

scope

Contemporary Research Topics

art & design 24:

August 2023

<https://doi.org/10.34074/scop.1024>

Published by Otago Polytechnic Press.
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Scope: Contemporary Research Topics (Art & Design) is peer-reviewed and published annually by *Scope: Contemporary Research Topics*, Otago Polytechnic Press. Otago Polytechnic Ltd is a subsidiary of Te Pūkenga - New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology.



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.

EBSCO Database: *Scope: Contemporary Research Topics (Art & Design)* is catalogued on the EBSCO Database in recognition of academic quality and alignment with international peer review processes.

An online version of the journal is available free at <https://thescope.org/journal/>

ISSN (for hardcopy version): 1177-5653;

ISSN (for online version): 1177-5661.

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Design & Typesetting: Joanna Wernham

Printing: Uniprint

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SAVING THE (ART) WORLD WITH OUR OWN TIME

Edward Hanfling

There is cause to feel depressed about the future of the arts and humanities in the New Zealand tertiary education sector. The past year has seen a succession of announcements about closing departments and cutting staff across universities. What is in store for those art schools that find themselves belonging to the vocational model of the new “skills-based institute,” tasked with meeting “the expectations of employers.”¹

Political attacks on the liberal arts are not new, either in Aotearoa New Zealand or internationally. Falling enrolments, staffing reviews, the axing of “frivolous” courses – these have been happening in New Zealand and internationally for decades. The popular refrain is that these disciplines (and their adherents) offer nothing to the economy, and that refrain grows increasingly strident in the midst of rising student fees and debt, and a gaping divide between the “productive” rich and the “useless” financially challenged.

Twenty years ago, I resigned from my position as lecturer in art history at the Quay School of the Arts, Whanganui Polytechnic. The Quay School was amongst the country’s top art schools. Don Binney, long-time lecturer at Auckland’s Elam School of Fine Art, extolled its virtues. It had a four-year Bachelor of Fine Arts. The quality, variety and originality of the student work was exceptional, especially in sculpture, where it seemed absolutely anything was possible and there was no “house style;” Mark Baskett has written evocatively of his time there in a previous issue of this journal.² But in 2001, Whanganui Polytechnic was subsumed into a larger entity with the ambitious name of the Universal College of Learning (UCOL). UCOL was initially just Palmerston North’s local Polytechnic, but it was given the power, by the Labour government of the time, to take over other polytechnics in the lower North Island. Quay School became a shadow of its former self.

How do we argue the value of an art school? The temptation is to say that the politicians and the public have got it wrong: studying and making art is useful, if one focuses not on the art itself, but on the enhanced “soft skills” of graduates – communication, problem-solving and critical thinking. An arts degree constitutes “vocational education,” because it fosters skills applicable to all manner of jobs.

This argument has merit, but it is also futile at best and self-defeating at worst. For one thing, the people it is aimed at do not care. If there is money to be saved, complex explanations about soft skills will not change the simple solution. For another thing, it is impossible to demonstrate that a graduate gained those invisible attributes from their programme of study. And the main problem is that to defend the arts on the basis of their economic usefulness is to play someone else’s game, not ours. People go to art school to make art, not to cultivate cognitive faculties conducive to working for the city council or some corporation or other. They are unlikely to be encouraged by the idea that their studies are preparing them to be a useful pawn in the capitalist system.

As the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths) bandwagon rolls on, dominating educational priorities and curricula development, there is a risk that defenders of the liberal arts will get swept up in the ideology in preference to being swept away altogether. Andrew Paul Wood, rehearsing the usual phrases about “soft skills,” “critical thinking” and “problem-solving,” has concluded that “we clearly need to move beyond the usual defence of the humanities as a common good in of [sic] itself.”³

Again, I demur. It is not necessary to regress into an art for art's sake fantasy world to insist that art has more value than helping STEM become STEAM. Such a multidisciplinary melange will only ever tolerate the added-on arts because they might enhance the "communication" of the STEM message, which, historically, has lined up neatly with an anthropocentric, progress-obsessed, climate-changing, Western materialist world view. STEM is the dominant ideology. STEAM means artists paying for a place at the table by compromising their alternative visions. Making art is not a retreat from reality, but it is generally a relatively benign activity compared to all the terrible ways of causing harm built into ostensibly useful or productive professions. Dunedin painter Saskia Leek has talked about her art as a way of living that does not involve being "driven to production." These "meandering, untied-down, inconsequential ways of doing," she believes, are nonetheless "important" and "political."⁴

In the United States, in 2008, English and Law theorist and academic Stanley Fish published a book, *Save the World on Your Own Time*, which responded to widespread cuts in state funding of university education.

The person who asks you to justify what you do is not saying 'tell me why you value the activity,' but 'convince me that I should,' and if you respond in the spirit of that request, you will have exchanged your values for those of your inquisitor. It may seem paradoxical to say so, but any justification of the academy is always a denigration of it.⁵

Stanley Fish

Fish advocates for academics to be brazenly antagonistic rather than "weak-kneed" and conciliatory:⁶ "We do what we do, we've been doing it for a long time, and until you learn it or join it, your opinions are not worth listening to."⁷ Whether this works any better than the 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em' strategy, I do not know, but I would sooner be unapologetic about the value of art than make it hostage to economic imperatives. Disciplines such as painting and art history are demonstrably sustained by their long, rich and diverse histories. That a large percentage of the nation's populace do not believe they are worthwhile does not mean such disciplines should be extinguished or eradicated (either by external forces or by people within the disciplines toadying to those who hold the power). The romantic alienated artist, pouring their heart out to an unfeeling world, seems like a relic of the past, but perhaps there is something to be said for retaining Rudolf Wittkower's 1961 description of the artist as "queer fish," if it denotes an unwillingness to be co-opted by corporate rhetoric and majoritarian politics.⁸

This issue of *Scope: Art & Design* is dedicated to art, not by design, but because all the contributors happen to have been students, lecturers or residents at the Dunedin School of Art. It begins and ends with essays on abstract painting, historically associated with the "purity" of aesthetic experience, but here conveying the interrelatedness of art and life. Emily Crossen's "Thinking in Colour" is exemplary of the distinctive nature of art making as research, where an immense amount of knowledge of histories and theories of colour is relegated to a series of fascinating footnotes, giving space to evocative reflections on experiences of colour in the everyday environment and in the studio. Linda Cook's "Incandescent Molecules" reveals the intricate process of making "sandwiches" out of paint, cardboard and an ingenious concoction of "pliable goop." These painted objects are, as Cook relates, made out of utilitarian materials, yet stubbornly resistant to use or rationalisation.

Between these essays on abstraction lie further riches that will elude any bean counter or bureaucrat. Rachel Allan and Vincent Chevillon compile unfolding chains of unexpected connections, between lived experience, archival research and storytelling. These are laments, ultimately, about the unfeelingness of human beings in their dealings with non-human beings and things. Raquel Salvatella de Prada mulls over the achievements and limitations of a COVID-era interdisciplinary collaboration between Duke University staff and students, grappling with the crisis of rising sea levels. Essays by Bridie Lonie (on the art of Anita DeSoto) and Lissie Brown (on her MFA project) assert the vitality of painting and sculpture respectively as mediums for challenging the marginalisation of women and of corporeal experience. There are further fascinating reflections on collaborative and individual projects, and art and science crossovers. The immediate political efficacy or application of this research is moot. It all surely, simply,

represents ways of spending time in the world, continually enacting ethical ways of making and living. I pay tribute, here, to all those “queer fish” in the arts and humanities, in and out of paid employment, who have enriched our world with non-instrumental knowledge, and I trust that even if that world is depressingly consumed by destructive agendas, *Scope 24* is an uplifting reminder of what art does when it is not being used for something else.

- 1 Te Pūkenga, “Introducing Te Pūkenga,” 29 September 2020, <https://www.xn--tepkenga-szb.ac.nz/news/introducing-te-pukenga/> (accessed 14 August 2023).
- 2 See Mark Baskett, “On the Echinat Question of What Might be Meant by the Term ‘Research’ When Evaluating and Discussing Visual Art,” *Scope: Art & Design* 22 (September 2023): 145-146.
- 3 Andrew Paul Wood, “‘We Cannot Afford to Neglect Them’: STEM the Tide, Save the Humanities,” *The Big Idea*, 26 August 2021, <https://thebigidea.nz/stories/we-cannot-afford-to-neglect-them-stem-the-tide-save-the-humanities>, (accessed 11 August 2023).
- 4 Saskia Leek, in conversation with Edward Hanfling, “Decoy Subjects: A Conversation with Saskia Leek,” *Art New Zealand* 168 (Summer 2018-19): 52.
- 5 Stanley Fish, *Save the World on Your Own Time: Higher Education Under Attack* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 154.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 161.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 165-166.
- 8 Rudolf Wittkower, “Individualism in Art and Artists: A Renaissance Problem,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22, no. 3, July-September 1961: 292.

THINKING IN COLOUR

Emily Crossen



Figure 1. Emily Crossen, 48x, 2020, acrylic on canvas, 5200x1820mm. Image courtesy of the artist.

I am increasingly obsessed with magenta. Transparent but vibrant. Layers and layers of it. And with the addition of violet it turns a deeper, richer colour. Paler versions, a pink that reminds me of cooling calamine lotion, smothered over sunburnt legs. Three pinks in a row. Put all the theory about colour to one side. There is so much you don't understand about colour until you paint it.

I realise that I think in colour combinations of three. My paintings are built in three layers: a background colour and two colours which weave over the top of each other. I thought about the paintings on the floor of the studio. I mixed chemical-sounding quinacridone magenta with glazing liquid and used it everywhere.

David Reed writes that "colour can seem to be from the future, the immediate future, perhaps a week or a few hours from now."¹ All those colour combinations that I haven't yet imagined. Maybe this is what he means. It's like overhearing small snippets of conversations whilst I sit in the museum café. A painting the colour of a cup of freshly stirred coffee, creamy white against the reflective black cup. How do you describe the beige/brown? Is it latte? Is that the colour of the twenty-first century? David Reed again: "There are new colours and colour relationships in the world that don't yet have emotional connotations and we as painters can create them."²

Lunch arrives ... painting in a warm bowl of carrot orange soup, threaded through with jewel-like pieces of green parsley.

Can you love a place because of its colours? Be homesick for the colours of the place where you grew up? I remember the bluebell woods, moss green on oak trees, blackberries which bled a deep rich purple red as they dripped into a jam. On my last visit to England, through the train windows all I saw was field after field of yellow rapeseed. Our relationship with colour is intertwined with emotion and associations. Tessa Laird says, "Red has never existed as an entity outside of things,"³ and Robert Motherwell, "any red is rooted in blood, glass, wine, and a thousand other concrete phenomena."⁴

I watch Derek Jarman's movie *Blue*, written whilst he is dying from Aids.⁵ If dying is blue to him, then my grief lies in the colours of autumn. Chestnut brown conkers litter the ground, their shiny skins reflecting the fallen decaying leaves, green to yellow, red to brown. Meanwhile, my mother lies in a bed, unable to stare at the garden full of the colours that she so loved. The season turns from verdant green to a barren brown, autumn always grief-struck now. Emotions and colour again.

Gretchen Albrecht painted deep grey/purple, near black, after her father's death. I imagine a slow, sadder sweep of her arm as it traces the familiar curve of the hemisphere.⁶ There is comfort in that. I know how that feels. The link between body and movement on the canvas. I take my shoes off and walk on the cold concrete floor; across the smooth surface of the canvas. Magenta is mixed and ready to go. I've done this before, but it takes courage and bravery every time. David Reed likens the experience of painting his abstract works to "losing the boundaries of your body."⁷ Judy Millar talks about painting to bring together the two realms or dual existence of being human, the physical (physicality) and the mental (creativity). "You want to be so close ... to put your whole body in there."⁸

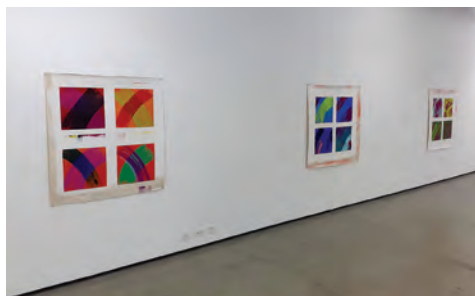


Figure 2. Emily Crossen, *In Colour*, Installation view, Dunedin School of Art Gallery, August 2022. Image courtesy of the artist.

Some colours have surprised me. I got intrigued by yellow. It is not a colour that I ever seem to plan on using, but I like the way it keeps peeking out from underneath the layers of one of the paintings. Even though I know that blue and yellow make green, there is a sense of wonder when the blue glaze sails over the top of the previous layers and makes green. This is what I am enjoying about the process of glazing, all these unanticipated colours that mix themselves on the painting.

I mix a yellow, maybe you would call it lemon yellow, although that could be misleading. New Zealand lemons are bright, almost artificial in their colour. This is a stark contrast to the insipid, pale lemons that you buy in England. I remember the colour choices I was offered to paint my childhood bedroom: Apple White, Apricot White, Barley White, Lemon White. It didn't feel like much of a choice. It was a colour chart of pallid whites, nothing inspiring other than the allusion to English orchards and the appeal of the small rectangular colour swatches. I craved a bright sunny yellow, maybe an antidote to the relentless grey skies of my childhood.

When does yellow become brown? Is there a point when it's neither yellow nor brown? Years later I fly over the dry, dusty, browned earth of Australia; those subtle English colours wouldn't survive out here. One of my paintings unintentionally ends up brown. I scrub the surface of it, hunting back through its layers in search of the yellow. The masking-taped edges show the evidence of all these layers of colour; violet, yellow, magenta, all the colours that somehow got me to brown.

Derek Jarman's chapter on yellow is titled "The Perils of Yellow."⁹ I think this could describe how I feel when I use yellow. Somehow it does feel perilous: "if you mix paints, you will be unable to mix yellow."¹⁰



Figure 3. Emily Crossen, 9², panel 2 (detail), 2021, acrylic on canvas, 3300x1800mm. Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 4. Emily Crossen, 9², 2021, acrylic on canvas, 3300x1800mm (each panel). Image courtesy of the artist.

Bridget Riley maintains that it is only by working with colour that you can see how colours act with each other: she writes, "well I'll just see what yellow can do."¹¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein asks that it is hard to imagine a hot grey, so can you have a cold yellow?¹² I start to take pleasure in applying yellow. Diaphanous, barely-there yellow, radiant, vivid yellow, buttery sun-bleached yellow. What about less pleasant yellows? Utterly dirty yellow, battered yellow. I mix a lot more yellow, more of a lime green, phthalo green goes in there. I apply it in great big strokes over the top of the dark blue painting. The brush mark stutters as it pulls across the surface of the painting.

In 1890 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, suffering from post-partum psychosis, is confined, by her doctor and husband, to a room with yellow wallpaper. The yellow wallpaper compounds her mental state and imprisons her further. She decides that the room itself has an unpleasant "yellow smell" emitting from the wallpaper; "a smouldering, unclean yellow" with a "sickly sulphur tint."¹³ What a contrast to Goethe's colour theory where yellow "is the colour nearest the light ... [it] carries with it the nature of brightness, a serene, softly exciting character ... a warm, agreeable impression."¹⁴ Wassily Kandinsky 'hears' colour; for him yellow is "hard and sharp ... trumpets are yellow."¹⁵ Maybe any colour in too much intensity can send you a little mad, locked in a room with it.¹⁶

Wittgenstein again: "if there were a theory of colour harmony, perhaps it would begin by dividing the colours into groups and forbidding certain mixtures or combinations and allowing others. And, as in harmony, its rules would be given no justification."¹⁷ I quite like the idea of finding a colour combination that is "forbidden." No neon yellow to be put in the vicinity of faded pink. I've always taken absolute delight in colour charts, paint chips and multi-hued fan decks. All those possibilities of colour systematically laid out.¹⁸

Returning the following day, I am still thinking about yellow and pink. I apply another layer over the top of the painting, magenta pink. Now I can see something is happening: the pink is activating both the blue and yellow layers. Hesitation and doubt are followed by action and the unexpected. I remember where my interest in yellow and pink stems from. I was given a box, one Christmas. A metal box. It was the 1980s and it had a geometric pattern on it, lots of pink and yellow. I loved the box and I wanted it to be full of equally delicious coloured pencils in every shade imaginable. Instead, I opened it to find it filled with make-up. A complete disappointment to my 11-year-old self. The make-up went in the bin, and I filled the tin with my favourite coloured pencils. I still have both the tin and the pencils, and I never did buy any more make-up.

"Colour deceives constantly," writes Josef Albers.¹⁹ Is that what he's thinking about as he sets out on his serial mission to "tame" colour?²⁰ Michael Taussig discusses the dual states of colour; both authentic and deceitful: "colour is another world, a splurging thing, an unmanageable thing, like a prancing horse or a run in a stocking ... this thing, this formless thing that we need to fence in with lines or marks."²¹

Katharina Grosse likes the "anarchical potential of colour," applying paint by spray gun to cover vast surfaces of fabric hung from walls and draped across the floor of the gallery.²² An explosion of colour; allowed to spread out wildly, taking pleasure in its excess. Grosse uses colour freely and intuitively, leaving what she calls a "history" of the paint laid bare. Green is made from a yellow as it crosses over blue. She doesn't like yellow. She still uses it.²³

I thought I wasn't particularly inspired by colours from nature and yet every day the sky seen from our deck throws out the most surprising of colours. An artificial-looking yellow light appears only for a few seconds. Goethe writes: "People experience a great delight in colour generally. The eye requires it as much as it requires light."²⁴ I can see why Albrecht felt she only had to look out the window or go into her garden for inspiration.

It isn't a particular colour that I am attracted to, but I am drawn to vibrant, high-contrast colours. Today, though, I mix Burnt Sienna, Burnt Umber, Nickel Azo Gold. Their earthiness surprises me. I had almost forgotten about this palette of colours.

Is this city too grey, too brown or even too green? Le Corbusier wanted to whitewash the city: "a coat of whitewash would be ... a manifestation of high morality, the sign of a great people ... it is honest and dependable."²⁵ In India I visited the city of Chandigarh. No whitewash here, only Le Corbusier's monolithic grey concrete buildings with their polite panels of ordered colour.²⁶ It seemed so out of place given the rest of my experience of India, where even the ordinary is made extraordinary by the visual delight and chaos of brilliant, saturated colours under an intense sky. Howard Hodgkin's ravishing palette was influenced by his love affair with India.²⁷

We eat breakfast on a rooftop, warm porridge sprinkled with cinnamon and nutmeg. The sun is already strong. The buildings cast deep shadows onto the streets below. Colour walks here. The street is filled with bright fabrics. Women gather in groups, forming colour combinations that would be hard to imagine. Sunburst yellow, shocking fuchsia pink, scarlet red threaded through with delicate strands of gold. Colours are saturated and intense. We visit pink cities, faded blue cities, floating white palaces and red forts. Whole cities that are stained through with colour: It seeps out of rocks and doorways, gets ingrained in your skin and falls as a magical, multi-coloured dust from your shoes at the end of a day.

We visit Dhobi Ghat, a huge outdoor laundry, where washing is done by hand in vast stone tubs. Six washing lines are strung with teal-coloured sheets, some faded by the bright sun. Brilliant whites, which blind with their whiteness, occupy row after row. When we first send out our washing to be done in a hotel in Kerala, our clothes come back in shades of pink. A bright red shirt has tinted our wardrobe for the rest of the trip.

That is how the colours of India remain with me. Energetic, intense, keyed-up colours. Colour that still fills my imagination and finds its way into the paintings.



Figure 5. Emily Crossen, 92, Installation view, Dunedin School of Art Gallery, August 2022. Image courtesy of the artist.

There are 44 squares on the walls of my studio. There has been a shift in my thought process. I am seeing them less as individual paintings and more as a serial enterprise, multiple squares together on one canvas, a single painting. For days I have been adding colour to them. Layers of colours glazed on each other. I like this repetitive action, this daily ritual. I add a gestural sweep of other colours. I begin to think of these like "stitches."²⁸ I find enjoyment in the idea that they are trying to be like each other, but each time they show their differences. I become fascinated by the layers of colour that appear on the neatly masking-taped edges. Small traces left behind of each layer of the process.

I am thinking about decision-making, and the speed of making those decisions, in relation to these 44 squares in front of me. The multiple decisions that it takes to complete each of these squares. I have ten pots of paint. How many colours can I make from these? How many ways are there of 'arriving' at green? On the first canvas I paint four blue, four red and four yellow. I know that I can make greens, but how many and what kind of greens? Muddy green, lime green? I start in a systematic way, writing down all the combinations of colours in a manner that resembles a mathematical equation.

How much control over the colour choice for the next square? The 'logic' of the grid seems to allow more and more freedom. Stanley Whitney refers to "call and response."²⁹ He begins painting in the top corner and, like writing, works his way across the page. I prefer to put a layer down in all the squares, to fill the white spaces, like colouring as a child. Some colours arrive fully formed; others develop slowly but I don't judge them. All colours equal. Gerhard Richter used a roll of the dice to decide which colour went to which square in his *Colour Charts* (1966-72).

Today I crave to escape the confines of the studio. The alchemy of mixing colour and applying to canvas feels restrictive. No colour seems enough, not brilliant or brave enough, unexpected or surprising enough. I leave the studio and walk. All those colour combinations, muted under the autumnal sky. A woman hurries by, her peach-pink scarf flapping in the wind. I pass the lime green of a rampant plant in an overgrown garden and the blue of a water pipe as it exits a building. I am like a magpie for colour, stealthily stealing colours.³⁰

Emily Crossen has lived and studied in Dunedin, where she has built a painting practice, since 2012. She previously worked as an architect and has a Master's in Architecture from the University of London. She graduated from the Dunedin School of Art with a Bachelor of Visual Arts in 2018 and a Master of Fine Arts in 2022.

- 1 David Reed, "Colour Game," in *Colour*, ed. David Batchelor (London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2008), 226.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 227.
- 3 Tessa Laird, *A Rainbow Reader* (Auckland: Clouds, 2013), 20-21. Tessa Laird's thesis is both a creative and academic piece of writing. It deals with the personal, emotive and political nature of colour and draws broadly on philosophy and art historical and literary sources. Here she explores the idea that it is hard to separate our cultural conditioning regarding 'red' (red reminding us of "things") and its emotive associations, even when used in monochromatic non-representational painting.
- 4 Philip Ball, *Bright Earth: The Invention of Colour* (London: Viking, 2001), 375-6. See, for example, Motherwell's *Red Open #3* (1973). Motherwell retained a belief in the emotive and socially engaged political context of his abstract works. His *Elegies* series, from 1948 on, encompassed the tragedies of the Spanish Civil War. In contrast, the paintings of the *Open Series* (1967-80) were optimistic and forward-looking, drawing on his love for Matisse and the window motif as a metaphor for inner meaning/outer world. Motherwell also refers to Matisse's use of an all-pervading colour – for example, red in *Harmony in Red* (1908). For a discussion of Motherwell's lean towards symbolism and the indirect "effect of the object," such as Motherwell's assertion that "red is rooted in blood," see Mary Ann Caws, *Robert Motherwell with Pen and Brush* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), 37.
- 5 Art Fund UK, *Blue: Derek Jarman's First Soundtrack Demo with Simon Fisher Turner*, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zc5np6-sEG0> (accessed 21 March 2020).
- 6 Luke Smythe, *Gretchen Albrecht, Between Gesture and Geometry* (Auckland: Massey University Press, 2019). See, for example, *Black Portal for Dad* (1996) and *In Memory of my Father (Ashes)* (1996) from her "Hemispheres" series (1996-98).
- 7 David Reed, "Studio Visit with David Reed: Gorky's Granddaughter," <http://www.gorkysgranddaughter.com/2016/06/david-reed-at-peter-blum-gallery-june.html> (accessed 20 March 2019).
- 8 Bob Chaundy, "Judy Millar Interview: The View from Nowhere," *Considering Art*, <https://consideringart.com/2018/09/15/judy-millar-interview-the-view-from-nowhere/> (accessed 3 March 2018).
- 9 Derek Jarman, *Chroma* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 1995), 89-94. Like his extended ode to blue, Jarman's book *Chroma* consists of ballads to colour. It is part poetry, part autobiography, with historical excerpts on colour.
- 10 Jarman, *Chroma*, 93.
- 11 Robert Kudielka, "The Colour Connection – In Conversation with Robert Kudielka," in *The Eye's Mind: Bridget Riley Collected Writings 1965-2009*, ed. Robert Kudielka, 2nd ed. (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), 146.
- 12 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*, ed. GEM Anscombe (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1977), 46e. Wittgenstein writes about colour from a philosophical viewpoint, based on observations of how colour functions and the its cultural and linguistic implications. He explores colour theories including those of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, about whom he is particularly scathing.
- 13 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1952/1952-h/1952-h.htm>.
- 14 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colours* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006), 168-169. Goethe was a German poet and writer. Goethe's theory or doctrine of colours is essentially two parts. His scientific experiments on colours of the prismatic spectrum and refraction put him in opposition to Isaac Newton's *Opticks*, 1704. This part of Goethe's theory has long been dismissed as having no scientific basis. However; his observational and subjective responses to colour, such as his theory of chromatic harmony, proved useful to painters and were taken up by later theorists, such as Adolf Hoetzel and the Bauhaus teachers. See also John Gage, *Colour and Culture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 201-3.
- 15 Frank Whitford, *Bauhaus* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2006), 111. Kandinsky played a key role in the emergence of abstract art and the idea that a work of art could express an inner state of mind or meaning without having a subject matter. Kandinsky claimed to possess synaesthesia, where one sense reacts when another is stimulated. He taught the preliminary course at the Bauhaus, focusing on colour and form. Distinctions of colours were based on their "temperatures," with yellow at the warm end of the scale and blue as cold at the opposite. These theories came via Goethe and Rudolf Steiner. Colour and form were intrinsically linked to "inner meaning" and emotional states and therefore had qualities arising from these elements. Although his findings were highly subjective, Kandinsky wanted to establish "universal laws" of colour.
- 16 Interestingly, Goethe remarks that in order to fully experience the effect of a colour on the mind, the observer should be in a room of just one colour (*Theory of Colours*, 168).
- 17 Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*, 12e.
- 18 Briony Fer, "Color Manual," in *Color Chart: Reinventing Color, 1950 to Today*, ed. Ann Temkin (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 28-38. Fer discusses the impact of mass-produced colour and the commercial colour chart and its influence on a shift to "matter-of-fact" colour in art making from the 1950s on.
- 19 Josef Albers, *Interaction of Color* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 1.

- 20 Nicholas Fox Weber; "Josef Albers," in *Josef Albers*, ed. Getulio Alviana (Milan: l'Archeditzioni, 1988), 10-11. I am thinking here of Albers' *Homages to the Square* series.
- 21 Michael Taussig, *What Color is the Sacred?* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 17. Taussig examines the "truth or deceit" of colour through the history of colonialism, and the idea of being both attracted to and "repelled" by the nature of "bold" colour.
- 22 Art 21, Katharina Grosse: *Painting with Color | Art21 'Extended Play'*, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBfPMGS7XPo> (accessed 25 April 2019).
- 23 For an example, see *The Horse Trotted Another Couple of Metres and Then it Stopped* (2018), featured in *Carriageworks, Carriageworks: Katharina Grosse*, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHIhfi1Z0xk> (accessed 28 August 2018).
- 24 Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, 167. The quotation is from the chapter "Effects of Colour with Reference to Moral Associations." Goethe associates colours with sensations and feelings – for example, his earlier comment about yellow.
- 25 Le Corbusier; "L'Art Decoratif d'aujourd'hui," in *Essential Le Corbusier: L'esprit Nouveau Articles* (Oxford: Architectural Press, 1998), 188-92.
- 26 For a discussion of Le Corbusier and concepts of whiteness and his use of colour in architecture, see David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), <https://approachestopainting.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/163577202-chromophobia-david-batchelor.pdf>, 46-49.
- 27 The Hepworth Wakefield, *Howard Hodgkin: Painting India at The Hepworth Wakefield*, YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmfJnqsP_Y&t=5s (accessed 5 August 2019). I have been particularly inspired by Hodgkin's late, intensely coloured India paintings. See, for example, *Now* (2015-16), a small painting, oil on exposed plywood, composed very simply of three broad brush strokes of lively red and vibrant yellow.
- 28 Harmony Hammond, "Feminist Abstract Art: A Political Viewpoint," in *The Heroine Paint: After Frankenthaler*, ed. Katy Siegel (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2015), 156-8. Hammond was writing in 1977. She focuses on a feminist-based perspective of making abstract art that has a long history through women making domestic objects such as sewing quilts. She writes of the repetitive 'stitch' as a form of visual diary.
- 29 Alex Bacon, "Stanley Whitney: Call and Response," in his *Stanley Whitney* (London and New York: Lisson Gallery and Cornerhouse Publications, 2016), 18-19. "Call and response" is a compositional technique in music and works like a conversation, with musicians responding in an improvised manner to each other. Whitney is inspired by experimental jazz and African music. In terms of his painting technique, he is treating each coloured square as its own painting and always in relation to the adjacent colours.
- 30 I was intrigued by Michael Taussig's account, in *What Color is the Sacred?*, of William Seward Burroughs' and Brian Gysin's "color walks." These developed from their idea of the "cut up technique" where a text (or, in Gysin's case, text and colour) is "cut up" and rearranged to be read in any order. Here Taussig is referring to the idea of colour released from cultural coding – in a sense, colour, like Charles Baudelaire's flâneur, is 'walking' the city. This parallels the visual thought process in my own colour walks. Is it possible to see colour for itself first, before association with an object or thing?

LA NOTTE / THE NIGHT

Simon Marcus Swale

BACKGROUND

This article charts the development and resolution of the body of work *La Notte / The Night*: 12 objects of powder-coated aluminium, and a related 1:12-minute video. These were initiated while I was a participant in the Handshake Project, a mentorship programme for emerging makers of contemporary jewellery in Aotearoa New Zealand. Each mentorship cycle typically accepts 12 participants, matching them up with a mentor for a two-year period. During my time as a participant of Handshake6 (the sixth iteration of the Handshake Project) from January 2020 to October 2022, participants came together for frequent online meetings and facilitated workshops with established artists, as well as producing a series of onsite group exhibitions. Handshake6 concluded with a final exhibition at Northart, a public gallery in Northcote, Auckland, from August to October 2022.

Synchronous with my participation in Handshake was the global COVID-19 pandemic. *La Notte / The Night* attempted to capture the experience and atmosphere of the pandemic in the moment, particularly the experience of isolation. While initially undertaken as a Handshake exercise, *La Notte* was developed further in response to a call for artists to submit work for an inaugural jewellery-related video exhibition, "SMCK ON REEL," part of the annual jewellery festival known as *Schmuck*, held in Munich from 6 to 10 July 2022.

BLACK

The work *La Notte / The Night* was first developed during Handshake6 as a video-making exercise under the direction of jewellery artist Estela Saez Vilanova. Vilanova was introduced to our group in May 2021 and conducted a series of online workshops. In one, Vilanova allocated each Handshake participant a colour from which we were to develop an exhibition concept (rather than a fully realised work for an exhibition). This concept was to be represented through a short, one-minute video. I was allocated the colour black, and it was from the resulting exhibition concept that *La Notte / The Night* continued to develop.

Black inspired a range of responses in me. While Aotearoa New Zealand has a reputation for a black-dominated fashion aesthetic, Ōtepoti Dunedin, where I am from, has its own reputation for a certain gothic sensibility, one embraced by local fashion designers such as Margarita Robertson of the brand NomD. As a supposed little Edinburgh in the South Pacific, Dunedin's colonial architecture and dank climate contributes to this sensibility. However, it was the experience of a swift-moving pandemic and the requisite lockdown that brought a heightened and ominous tone to our environment; the queues of masked individuals awaiting entry to the supermarket was a dystopian experience to behold.

It was the depths of winter, and the first lockdown had already taken its toll. A second lockdown had ended in most of the country, but Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland remained locked down and isolated. The news media was saturated with COVID: government policy updates, vaccination requirements, stats on infections, hospitalisations and deaths. The world had changed swiftly, and articulations of the 'new normal' only enhanced a perception that this state of affairs would have an ongoing impact. It was during a return journey home from the supermarket one night that the

concept of COVID as a long, dark journey coalesced in me. Driving alone through the rain and dark, with just the occasional flash of headlights coming towards me, I recorded on my phone, through the windscreen, footage that would become the central component of *La Notte*.

My initial exhibition concept, in response to Vilanova's exercise, was for a black-painted room. In the middle of the room would be a large table, wrapped in black plastic, for the display of work. Above this, low hanging lights would themselves be wrapped in black plastic. Along one black wall would hang spotlit objects. On an adjacent wall would be a projection of the footage captured while driving through the rain. Opposite this, another projection, a segment of the film *La Notte* by Michelangelo Antonioni (1961), from which I borrowed the title for my own work. Shot in black-and-white, and like all of Antonioni's films of this early 1960s period, *La Notte* meditates on a sense of alienation in increasingly industrialised post-war Italy. Ennui haunts this film; an inability to communicate impacts relationships, and characters seem to drift through their situations limply, as if in a daze. This seemed to me comparable to the isolation and disconnection experienced during COVID lockdowns and in the periods of uncertainty that followed.

Having developed the concept, I made a diorama of the exhibition, and then a video simulating an exhibition walk-through, a montage that included the above-mentioned video footage.

Shortly after the Handshake Project came a call for artists to submit work for a jewellery-related video exhibition, "SMCK ON REEL," part of *Schmuck 2022*. *Schmuck* is the premier contemporary jewellery event on the international calendar, part of the annual craft exhibition held each year in Munich, Germany. Curated by Loukia Richards and Christoph Ziegler, and occupying two galleries in Munich for the duration of *Schmuck*, "SMCK ON REEL" was the first international jewellery exhibition focusing on video work. My contribution was a new video created, inspired by and extending upon the initial video created for Handshake.



Figure 1. Slmon Swale, *La Notte*, video still.

ATMOSPHERE AND TIME

The final video dispensed with the exhibition theme and the footage from Antonioni's film was also removed, in part due to copyright concerns, but also for simplicity and clarity. Atmosphere was now the main focus, and relied upon the footage of driving through the rain at night: repetition and monotony; the rhythm of the wiper blades; the white noise of the constant rain; and a sense of infinitely repeating time in the flickering repetition of the white centrelines and the occasional flashing past of headlights from passing cars.

Also pivotal to the atmosphere of the original video footage was the music playing on the car stereo: Glenn Gould's piano interpretation of JS Bach's *French Suites* (1722-25). Driving alone, the plaintive, mournful strains of the music transported me into a distinctively filmic experience, enhanced by the view being framed by the windscreen while all else remained in darkness. For copyright reasons I replaced the Gould track with a similarly haunting creative commons recording of another Bach piano piece.¹

From 'tuning in' to the atmosphere of the video came a greater sensitivity to time which, during the period of the pandemic, seemed fundamentally altered, utterly distinct from that of previous life. I considered the notion of 'COVID time,' a kind of suspended time outside of our usual experiences. Perhaps this is what made lockdowns so psychologically difficult? COVID time induced a sense of indefinite waiting; waiting for a workable vaccine, waiting for things to become better. But would things become better? How could we feel confident in the future as new strains of the virus emerged? Fear, dread and, for many, grief dominated.

COVID time could seem rapid (a quickly changing situation, the virus mutating, moving in waves and becoming increasingly infectious and transmissible) as well as, more frequently, cripplingly slow. Aching and insufferable, lockdown is an experience of stiflingly limited repetition, of waiting and hoping. Days drift by and blur, fading and merging into one another; time interminable. We live this experience collectively, yet so often in isolation from each other. We seem stuck in what Maurice Blanchot calls an "unbearable present ... a present without end and yet impossible as a present."² Hope fades, and waiting transforms into suffering.

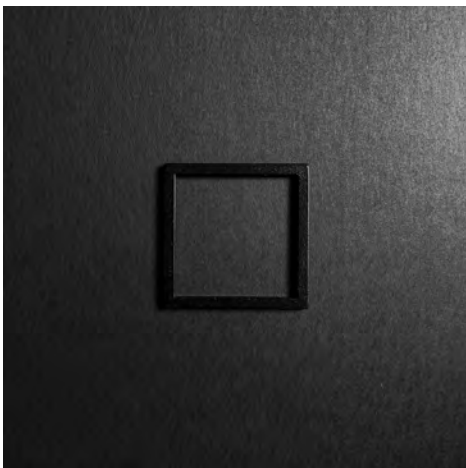
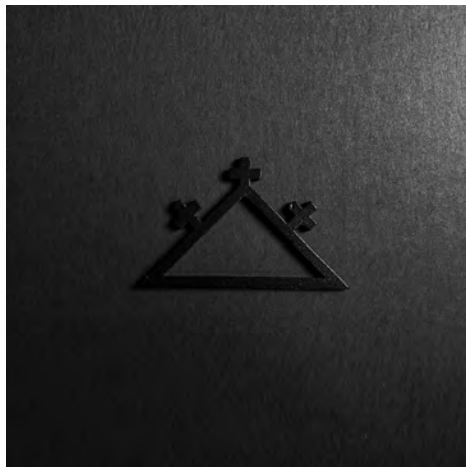
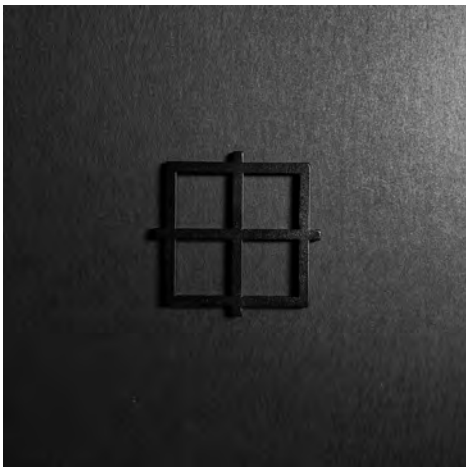
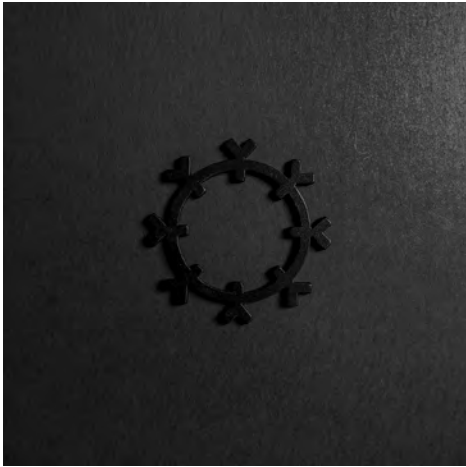
The sense of time described here is not quantifiable by seconds or minutes, but is a felt and embodied time; the body enveloped in time. French philosopher Henri Bergson defined this experience of subjective lived time as *durée* or 'duration,' distinct from the objective time of watches, clocks and calendars. He recognised that time is not always experienced as ordered, sequential and predictable. Time, as it is lived, felt and acted, cannot simply be quantified by science, but is nonetheless real and true.³ COVID has presented us with an uncertain time, an uncertain future. Waiting becomes open and potentially unending: "waiting is not to be passed through."⁴ COVID time is a time endured.

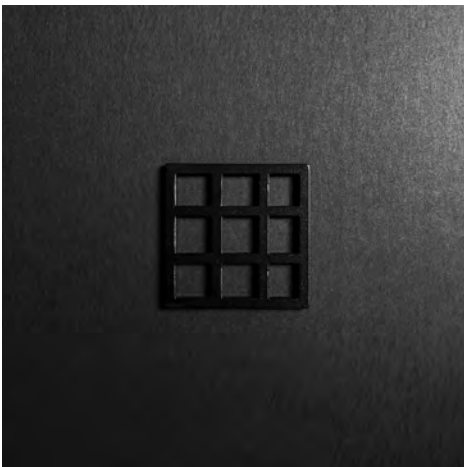
OBJECTS

Inspired by the initial concept video, I made a set of 12 physical objects that would feature in the final video, while also being autonomous works in their own right as contemporary jewellery. Approximately 65mm in height and width, each piece is cut from 4mm aluminium sheet. These objects act as a series of charms, amulets or talismans, each an abstraction of the COVID experience. Finished with black powder coating, these objects were shot against a black ground and edited to appear and dissolve as the original car footage played out.



Figure 2. Simon Swale installation view of the 12 objects.





CONCLUSION

La Notte attempted to capture something of the unique historical moment of a global pandemic, at the time it occurred. It was created out of the boredom, frustration and anxiety of the pandemic experience, but also in the belief that after the dark night will come a bright dawn.

The video *La Notte / The Night; Love, Loss and Loneliness in the Age of Isolation* was first shown at Galerie Weltraum and Bayerischer Kunstgewerbeverein, Munich, as part of *Schmuck 2022* (6 to 10 July 2022), in the exhibition “SMCK ON REEL,” the world’s first video festival dedicated to jewellery. Since then, “SMCK ON REEL” has been shown at the Grassi Museum, Leipzig; the Romanian National Library, Bucharest (as part of Romanian Jewelry Week); the Museum of Applied Arts & Design, Vilnius; and the National Museum of History of Ukraine, Kyiv.

The jewellery objects that feature in the video work were first shown alongside the video in “Whānui,” a curated exhibition of Handshake alumni, at The National, Ōtautahi Christchurch, in October 2022.

The video can be found on the artist’s Youtube channel <https://youtu.be/PMKDg63sW4c> and is available also on the *SMCK Magazine* website <https://www.smck.org/smck-reel/munich2022.html>.

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- 1 Variation 15 of Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*, courtesy of Kimiko Ishizaka and MuseScore.com. The Open Goldberg Variations (<https://www.opengoldbergvariations.org/>) is a project by pianist Kimiko Ishizaka and MuseScore.com, intended to create a public domain recording and score of JS Bach’s masterpiece, *Die Goldberg Variationen* (BWV 988).
- 2 Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 44.
- 3 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W Scott Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1988).
- 4 Harold Schweizer, *On Waiting* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 112.

JUST LIKE THE MOVIES

Rachel Hope Allan



As I looked in my rear vision mirror, I could see cars tumbling towards me, the other motorists swerving to avoid the debris, and then the carnage as they got caught by the ice. Just like the movies, I thought. One by one they hit each other; then the concrete median. Torn car parts and car tyres littered the freeway. Then came the sirens. Numb, I pull over in a truck-stop. As I inhale my last Black Russian cigarette, a stranger wearing blue jeans and a fur hat approaches, clapping. "Great driving skills, girl!" He emphasises the "girl!" "It's a rental," I quip back, hands shaking. With my stomach still located somewhere between my throat and my front teeth, I know that I have to turn back onto the frozen highway if I want to make it to the border before dark. Closer to Kodak, closer to the eighth wonder of the world. The home of payday loans, cheap liquor, burnt-out forests and honeymooners.

Pulled from my archive, Niagara exists for me both as an episodic memory and as a construction. It occurs somewhere between a choke artist's wet dream and a pilgrimage to an orca.¹ My Niagara is emblematic of the raw power and the sometime unsubtle delicacy of nature. It is born from a story retold, a story passed down and a story rewatched. My black-and-white images pull focus to my incomplete recollections and expand on the long-believed notion that photographs have the ability to obstruct authentic memories. Mind and computer now offer a do-over of sorts. As the real and the simulated collide, I swim laps. I remember the bitter cold, the camera that went to the moon and the SkyWheel ride from hell.² I remember the lipstick on my cigarette butt, the vodka and coke. I remember the snow underfoot, the sound of the falls and the reflection in the glass.



There are two sides to Niagara Falls: The 'Rust Belt' New York Niagara Falls that became a casualty of corruption,³ with its chemical plants and a crime rate that was almost double the US average;⁴ and Niagara Falls, Ontario: a town of heart-shaped baths and stacked pancakes, where the only real danger is escaped animals from roadside zoos,⁵ or falling on one of the many slippery unmaintained paths.⁶

There is something otherworldly about Niagara Falls. You can feel the rumbling underground before you can see it. In 1751 it was reported that you could hear it 15 leagues (45 km) away. It is one of the most iconic natural landmarks on the planet, with millions of vacationers flocking to the region each year to witness its stunning beauty. Everyone knows it's a tourist trap, but they come anyway. They "Journey behind the Falls" and sail on *The Maid of the Mist*. They visit Marineland and do the "White Water Walk."

I went to Niagara for three reasons: Kiska, a man named Eastman and Marilyn Monroe.

Niagara is a 1953 American film-noir thriller directed by Henry Hathaway. The film centres on a honeymooning couple: George and Rose Loomis. George (played by Joseph Cotton) is a brooding war veteran, while Rose (played by Marilyn Monroe) is a flirtatious and troubled femme fatale. The film delves into themes of betrayal, jealousy and obsession, as well as the contrast between the beauty of nature and the darkness of humanity. It is a technicolour feast of adultery and murder gone wrong, of broken promises, wet stairs and damaged handrails. It is a damp film with a slippage in reality for both the viewer and the participants. In *Niagara*, the murderer gets murdered and the husband plays his song on the bells.



Marineland, located on Portage Road, Niagara Falls, Ontario, opened in 1961. Along with belugas, bottlenose dolphins, sea lions, walruses, bears, deer, alligators and many other creatures, the park has housed 26 orcas, one of them being Kiska. Kiska was an Icelandic killer whale who was captured off the coast of Ingolfshofdi in 1978. She was three years old when sentenced to a life of performing tricks in a concrete chlorinated tank, 4,371 km away from her pod. Kiska was often referred to as the loneliest orca in the world. All her tank-mates died or were traded. All five of her calves died when they were young: Athena, Hudson, Nova, Kanuck and one who didn't survive long enough to be named. In total, 21 orcas have died at Marineland. Research shows that orcas feel deep, complex emotions and visibly show grief.⁷ Kiska was a vocal orca. She used to call out, chirping and clicking, but in 2011 she went silent when she lost her last companion, Ikaika, son of the Blackfish.⁸ Ikaika was returned to Seaworld after four years because he would constantly taunt and tease Kiska. He was over 6.4 metres long and incredibly agile for his size. He would take bites out of her and chase her around the tank – a tank that would take only ten seconds to cross, end to end. For the next 12 years Kiska was kept in solitary confinement, where she repeatedly banged her head against the walls of her tank. It was snowing as I sat in the gutter outside Marineland, metres away from where she floated listlessly. My butt was cold and I sobbed. I cried for Rose and for the Big Fish.



In 1801 the first recorded couple honeymooned at Niagara. It wasn't always heart-shaped tubs and champagne towers, but Niagara Falls has been the honeymoon capital of the world for over 215 years.⁹ There must be something about the crashing water and misty spray enveloping the landscape that makes the visible corruption and flying saucer restaurants fade into the background. It's just so fucking majestic.

But Niagara is different in the winter. There are piles of grey snow in the carparks and most of the motels are shut up for the off season. The 'tourist tax' still exists but the town feels a little less seedy, a little less plastic.¹⁰ The significance of Niagara extends far beyond its nostalgic aesthetic appeal. 'Niagara' is a derivative of the Iroquoian word 'Onguiaahra,' which translates as 'thundering water' or 'neck,' depending on the interpretation. The Iroquoian people have many legends and stories associated with Niagara Falls and it has been a significant site for them for generations. The falls were considered a powerful, sacred place.

The Iroquois believed that the waters were controlled by a great spirit named Hah-nu-nah,¹¹ who lived in a cave behind the Falls. I never ventured behind the falls or boarded *The Maid of the Mist*. The ice was so unmanageable that year. It was too dangerous to do water-based activities, so I went to Rochester. I drove 145 km in a blizzard to visit the camera that went to the moon and the Kalart Synchronized Range Finder from Iwo Jima. To hold cameras that belonged to Eadweard Muybridge, Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen, Edward Weston, Ansel Adams and Diane Arbus. To sit in George Eastman's chair and nonchalantly loiter outside the EE Boynton House.¹²

In 2019, Canada banned whales, dolphins and porpoises from being bred or held in captivity, with an exemption for the marine mammals already acquired. In 2021, the S-241 Bill, known as The Jane Goodall Act, had its first reading.¹³ In the bill's preamble it spoke of the urgency regarding Kiska. It suggested that "the Ontario Government had jurisdiction to grant civil standing to Kiska ... that would allow for a court order in her best interests by her own right, such as relocation to the whale sanctuary planned at Port Hilford, Nova Scotia."

Kiska never got to Nova Scotia. She died this year (on my birthday).¹⁴ She was the last killer whale in Canada. Kiska was 47 years old. She had spent 45 of those years in captivity, 12 of those in isolation.

Marineland currently has dolphins, four species of sea lions and 51 beluga whales.¹⁵ Their 'touch and feed show' is currently "under review."¹⁷



My Niagara is as much about photography's complex relationship to memory as it is to my complicated relationship to what was and wasn't photographed. I could hear Kiska in her prison. But I photographed the empty hotels and Taco Bells, while stories from my grandmother and my near-death experience collided in my head. My Niagara is underground and disorientating. She is wet and confronting. She is the itchy scratchy series that just wouldn't let me be. She is all-encompassing. She is beauty, she is brutal, she is violent. The truth can be found floating somewhere in the middle.

As of April 2023, there are 54 known orca in captivity.

Marineland is currently looking for a new owner!¹⁷

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- 1 Niagra [sic] Falls: When a male receives fellatio and, immediately prior to ejaculation, rams his penis into the giver's throat causing them to gag up the semen and have it drip and flow out of their nose. *Urban Dictionary*, <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Niagra%20Falls&page=2> (accessed 27 June 2023).
- 2 The Niagara SkyWheel is a 175-foot tall Ferris wheel that offers a bird's-eye-view of the falls and the surrounding area. I have never really been afraid of heights. I would jump off anything into water. That was until I went on the SkyWheel at Niagara Falls. I am not sure if it was because it was my 40th birthday or because of the high winds and the realisation in said death-trap that you can't sue in Canada.
- 3 In 2015, a former NRP Constable was convicted of smuggling wheels of mozzarella and chicken wings into Canada. Brad Hunter; "Niagara Blues: NRP Has History of Corruption, Brutality," *Toronto Sun*, 30 November 2018, <https://torontosun.com/news/provincial/niagara-blues-nrp-has-history-of-corruption-brutality>. "Former Head of Niagara Falls Housing Authority Pleads Guilty to Stealing Government Funds: Son and Daughter-in-Law Also Convicted," *State Comptroller*, 7 December 2017, <https://www.osc.state.ny.us/press/releases/2017/12/former-head-niagara-falls-housing-authority-pleads-guilty-stealing-government-funds-son-and-daughter>; "7 held in Corruption Linked to Federal Contracts," *New York Times*, 21 November 1985, <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/11/21/nyregion/7-held-in-corruption-linked-to-federal-contracts.html>.
- 4 "Crime Rate in Niagara Falls, New York (NY): Murders, Rapes, Robberies, Assaults, Burglaries, Thefts, Auto Thefts, Arson, Law Enforcement Employees, Police Officers, Crime Map," *City-Data.com*, <https://www.city-data.com/crime/crime-Niagara-Falls-New-York.html> (accessed 20 March 2023).
- 5 Chad Derrick (producer), "Secretly Recorded Footage Exposes Conditions at Ontario's Roadside Zoos," *CTV News*, 6 November 2022, updated 9 November 2022, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/w5/secretly-recorded-footage-exposes-conditions-at-ontario-s-roadside-zoos-1.6139694>.
- 6 According to [travelsafeabroad.com](https://www.travelsafeabroad.com), it is "one of the safest . . . cities in the world." Although this fits with my narrative perfectly, it would be remiss of me not to state that I am not sure how reputable this site is or where they get their statistics from. In fact, their claim that "Niagara Falls is completely free of scammers" makes me wonder if the site is actually a scam. "How Safe is Niagara Falls for Travel?," <https://www.travelsafe-abroad.com/canada/niagara-falls/> (accessed 27 June 2023).
- 7 Michael Mountain, "A Mother Orca's Grief – In the Ocean and in Captivity," *The Whale Sanctuary Project*, 3 August 2018, <https://whalesanctuaryproject.org/a-mother-orcas-grief-in-the-ocean-and-in-captivity/>.
- 8 Ikaika was Tilikum's son. Tilikum of Blackfish: the one that degloved his trainer; the one on valium, dubbed a "serial killer" but still forced to perform.
- 9 "Niagara Falls Honeymoons," <https://www.niagarafallsstatepark.com/plan-your-trip/honeymoons> (accessed 27 June 2023).
- 10 Kimia Afshar Mehrabi, "There's a Major Issue with Hidden Fees Being Charged to Tourists at Niagara Falls," *DH Canada*, 11 February 2023, <https://dailyhive.com/canada/major-issue-hidden-fees-charged-tourists-niagara-falls>.
- 11 "The Iroquois Creation Story," *Native Languages of the Americas*, <http://www.native-languages.org/iroquoisstory.htm> (accessed 27 June 2023).
- 12 6 East Blvd, Rochester, NY 14610, United States. The Edward E Boynton House is a private residence designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1908, in the Prairie School style. "E.E. Boynton House," *Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation*, <https://franklloydwright.org/site/e-e-boynton-house/> (accessed 27 June 2023).
- 13 Parliament of Canada, "Bill S-241, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act (great apes, elephants and certain other animals)," first reading 22 March 2022, The Honourable Senator Kyln, <https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/bill/S-241/first-reading> (accessed 2 April 2023).
- 14 "Kiska, the Last Captive Killer Whale in Canada, Has Died," *CBC News, The Canadian Press*, 10 March 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/kiska-killer-whale-marineland-dies-1.6775673>.
- 15 "Belugas at Marineland," *The Whale Sanctuary Project*, <https://whalesanctuaryproject.org/whales/belugas-at-marineland/> (accessed 27 June 2023).
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LOOK UNDER THE LEAVES

Marion Wassenaar

Artist in Residence Report:

BigCi, NSW Australia, 15 February – 14 March 2023



Figure 1. Entering the village of Bilpin during the 'Black Summer' fires in early January 2020.

In March 2019, an email arrived with the offer of a self-funded residency at BigCi, the "Bilpin international ground for Creative initiatives."¹ The directors wrote that "your artistic practice would be much enriched by the unique environment around BigCi with the different, sometimes strange but always beautiful landscape, fauna and flora that give inspiration to so many artists who come to BigCi."² Following further email correspondence, a date for the residency was confirmed for June and July 2020.



Travelling to Sydney in early 2020 on family business proved timely for a reconnaissance visit by car to Bilpin, a quaint mountain village near BigCi. The area is in the northern reaches of the Blue Mountains and is renowned for apple orchards and cider. However, the devastating 'Black Summer' bush fires that occurred at this time, affecting a large area of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, had a catastrophic impact. Pockets of bushland still smouldered, the season's apple harvest was left in doubt, and the biodiversity of the area was threatened. The smell of smoke hung in the air, with trees on either side of the road visibly blackened by the fire. The landscape was eerie, like entering an apocalypse. What followed was the COVID-19 pandemic and the postponement of the residency. Ironically, the project proposal involved researching local plant material for charcoal use as an artistic medium.

Fast forward to February 2023 and the residency opportunity finally eventuated. The original proposal to create charcoal was not deemed appropriate in the height of summer, with the fires remaining raw in the locals' memories. It was, however, astonishing to see the rapid recovery and regeneration of the bush. The shedding of the outer layer of singed bark and the coping mechanism of epicormic regrowth for many eucalyptus species unveiled a bushland reincarnated amidst impressive resilience. Evidence of the fires remains throughout the area with the occasional burnt-out stump, sparse tree trunks yet to shed blackened bark and the scattered debris of charcoal littering the forest floor.

BigCi is a short walk from the village of Bilpin, less than two hours' drive from Sydney. On BigCi's doorstep is the protected area of the Wollemi National Park, declared a wilderness under the NSW Wilderness Act of 1987. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), an international organisation promoting nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, defines wilderness as: "Usually large unmodified or slightly modified areas, retaining their natural character and influence, without permanent or significant human habitation, protected and managed to preserve their natural condition."³ The primary objective for a wilderness categorisation is: "To protect the long-term ecological integrity of natural areas that are undisturbed by significant human activity, free of modern infrastructure and where natural forces and processes predominate, so that current and future generations have the opportunity to experience such areas."⁴

Figure 2. Lichen encrusted sandstone is in abundance in the Wollemi National Park.

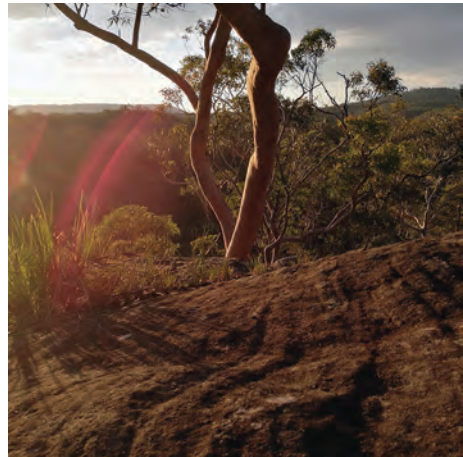


Figure 3. Exploring the Wollemi wilderness.

Figure 4. Marks made by moth larvae on the Scribbly Gum tree made visible by the shedding of bark.

Figure 5. Detail of the Wollemi Pine (*wollemia nobilis*) seen thriving at the Mt Tomah Botanic Gardens.

Figure 6. Sundown over the Wollemi wilderness from sunset rock.

After establishing the facility in early 2012, directors Rae and Yuri Bolotin run the residency programme at BigCi. Both Rae and Yuri are enthusiastic about the programme, with Rae, a sculptor, providing artistic support and feedback and Yuri, an explorer, writer and environmentalist, offering his knowledge of the local area.

Accommodating five artists during the four-week residency, the Art Shed and Art Barn, set in native bush, provide ample studio space and generous facilities in which to create, reflect, discuss ideas, engage in discussion and navigate bushland adventures, including unexpected encounters with the local wildlife. Chirping cicadas resonate as a constant reminder that we were in the height of summer, with temperatures often exceeding 30 degrees Celsius. The cackling kookaburras present an audible sign of cohabitation in the Australian bush. A bush rat, making its presence known in the kitchen and caught in a live capture cage outside the building, became the lure for an elusive female diamond python, not seen in the area for two years. The rat was suitably despatched at a distance from the Art Shed, but the encounter with the snake lingers as one of highlights of the stay. This does not apply to the mosquitoes, though the mosquito net provided to sleep under was a blessing.



Figure 7. Artists at work in the generous studio space.



Figure 8. Marion Wasseenaar, *Look Under the Leaves*, 2023, monoprints on paper.

The first full day of the residency, Yuri introduced the artists to the local area with two bush walks. The morning walk toured the BigCi property, introducing the native flora, fauna and geology. The property is not highly cultivated, allowing natural regeneration to take place. Evident were mighty angophoras, with their pink bark, scribbly gums with their 'scribbles' made by moth larvae as they tunnel between the layers of bark, flowering banksias and the remnants of an abandoned Finnish settlement. The leech, appearing stealthily and attaching to the lower leg, remains an anti-climax. Decent boots, long socks and thick trousers would be recommended on future bush walks. The single Wollemi Pine (*Wollemia nobilis*, family Araucariaceae) is a tree gifted to the property and is less than a metre tall. Thought to be extinct, a chance exploration of a temperate rainforest canyon in the Wollemi National Park in 1994 led to their rediscovery. This location remains top secret. The Mt Tomah Botanic Gardens propagate the Wollemi Pine and have seedlings for sale, with many trees already established in the grounds.

Venturing across the road from BigCi for the second (late afternoon) walk, at a cooler time of the day, Yuri led the group into a valley. To uphold the wilderness status there are no defined walking tracks, so the group became reliant on and trusting of Yuri's extensive knowledge. On the way he discussed landmarks and signs of Aboriginal habitation. Aboriginal artefacts offer a significant cultural legacy rooted in these lands today, both visible and felt. Sandstone shelters with handprints using natural pigment on sandstone walls, spear-sharpening furrows and early fireplace remnants reveal a past human presence. We traversed sandstone outcrops and boulders, with Yuri pointing out the significance of the sandstone and how the porous stone retains moisture to support plant survival, given the limited soil available. The tour concluded at the aptly named sunset rock, an enormous sandstone boulder, where we sat and absorbed the vista across the valley towards Mt Wilson in the west. This became a regular resting place at the end of the day to watch the sun go down.

While these walks prompted contemplation on the cycles of life, an illustrated children's book on ecology by Elsie Locke, *Look Under the Leaves*,⁵ provided inspiration and the title for a project; one that reflects on resilience and adaptability following the extraordinary recovery of the bush from the devastating fires. Forest-floor litter, including leaves, shedding bark and charcoal debris, are all important beneficial elements of the ecosystem, serving as habitat for invertebrates and as a valuable source of nutrients, providing a foundation for subterranean food webs.

Beneath the litter, the local sedimentary sandstone forms the bedrock for a considerable area of this wilderness region, and the foundation for the project. My initial experience with sandstone occurred in the form of Sydney's built heritage; visits to Sydney over the years regularly involve a visit to the Art Gallery of NSW. Emerging from the underground station at St James, having navigated the tunnels under Hyde Park to come into sight of St Mary's Cathedral and the other towering buildings nearby, also constructed of sandstone, is an all-encompassing experience. In a different context, the BigCi residency highlights sandstone as an active agent continuously supporting a vital ecology. There is beauty in the escarpments, overhangs, deeply channelled gorges and canyons, and awe-inspiring geological features such as pagoda rock formations.

Often overlooked, sandstone plays host to lichens. Lichens are an intimate symbiosis in which two species live together as a type of composite organism made up of algae (photobiont) and fungi (mycobiont).⁶ Lichens create a lush, mantled tapestry of form and texture reminiscent of the vintage crochet doilies that once adorned dressing tables. Lichens respond to environmental extremes by becoming dormant, quickly becoming metabolically active again when they experience more benign conditions.⁷ There is also value in the way sandstone, with its porosity and permeability, supports such a diverse ecosystem. Sandstone aquifers sustain so much life, decanting nutrients into the surroundings, their cracks and crevices providing a solid foothold for tree roots. Merlin Sheldrake's book *Entangled Life*, which has a chapter on lichens and interconnectedness, provides insightful dialogue on the tenacity of lichens to weather extreme conditions in situations of fragile instability.⁸ Sheldrake sees lichens as resembling the archipelagos and continents of an unfamiliar atlas.⁹



Figure 9. Gloria Sulli, foreground and Han Qing at rear preparing for the Open Day.

Figure 10. Annette Köhn presenting original drawings used in her publication, *Annette in Australia*.

Figure 11. Mike Wall, presenting his photographic works at Open Day.

As is characteristic of printmaking, the project took on a repetitive task, not in the form of an edition, but as unique state prints representing the lichen-encrusted sandstone. The single monoprint matrix creates a palimpsest over the previous print, leaving a barely visible trace between each printing. Eco-friendly soy-based printing inks were trialed and proved versatile in their slow drying time, conduciveness to hand-printing and clean-up. The circular filter papers, including some with the faint printed impression of leaves, represent the many permeable layers of material and matter that support this cyclic environment.

A Sunday morning visit to the Mountain Spring Buddhist Monastery in Bilpin, in week two of the residency, allowed an opportunity for both a sitting meditation and a walking meditation. Brother Phap Hai introduced the morning programme, stressing the importance of attentiveness to all you do, to be fully present and aware. In the walking meditation the emphasis was to begin where we are and take a step, one step at a time – to become aware of the contact of our feet with the ground. So much of the time spent at the residency involved direct contact with the land. One felt connected. The final installation for “Look Under the Leaves” consisted of 27 monoprints and 42 filter papers, with the installation extending from the floor and up the wall. It felt vital, in terms of access and response to the environment, that the project installation originated on the ground.

At an Open Day event on the last Sunday of the residency, the resident artists exhibited their artworks and each presented an artist talk. A wonderful atmosphere ensued, with locals and visitors from Sydney and further afield attending the daylong event and shared lunch. Gloria Sulli, an artist originally from Italy and now living in Melbourne, produced a breathing sculpture made from plastic that referenced the tenacity of plants’ survival with their epicormic regrowth. Han Qing, a Chinese painter and four-time resident, worked with oil paints to produce a colourful series of works based on the iconic Australian jacaranda trees in flower. Annette Köhn, a comic artist and publisher from Berlin, Germany, displayed original sketches and a 16-page publication of her travels and residency to date titled “Annette in Australia.” Mike Wall, photographer from the southern Blue Mountains, displayed a series of optically intriguing gridded works showing the beauty of local caves.

The BigCi residency offers an incredible opportunity to experience these treasured surroundings and befriend fellow artists, one that will continue to inspire and hold special memories.

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All images are by the author, Marion Wassenaar.

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LANDSCAPES OF ATTACHMENT

Pippi Miller

Smeuse is a Sussex dialect noun for 'the gap in the base of a hedge made by the regular passage of a small animal'; now I know the word smeuse, I will notice these signs of creaturely movement more often.

Robert Macfarlane, *Landmarks*¹

In an attempt to connect further with the environment around me, I began reading a genre of non-fiction dubbed 'nature writing.' Writers on the subject may speak of alien wonders and stark landscapes, but they also write of places they have seen, places that are now storied by people. The tradition of nature writing in Britain has a long history, but to remain succinct I would gesture toward the new nature writing, which responds to the ecological anxieties and changes occurring societally, in particular the writings of Helen Macdonald and Robert Macfarlane. These texts have informed how I approach my own surroundings in New Zealand. I share the concerns of these writers about the disconnection of people from nature. These writings also show how language helps us to attach value to nature.

I began with a quote from Macfarlane's *Landmarks*. The word 'smeuse' is one example amongst many of fading nomenclature for nature that Macfarlane has collected. I found particular affection for smeuse because I had already noticed little tunnels in the hedges of my parents' garden in Dunedin. Those tunnels had always marked the movement of creatures unseen in the landscape, but never before have I had a way of describing them. Sadly, I could point and cry "smeuse!" and have nobody, except perhaps Macfarlane himself, understand what I am talking about.

Macfarlane's writing re-animates the landscape through bringing our attention to the language that describes it. Of course, this is old news for anyone who has an understanding of semiotics: "Words – defined by Peirce as 'symbolic' – are far more arbitrary in their sound and shape, and are only by convention related to their referent. They refer to what they name, operating by way of description, depending on a shared lexical storehouse for mutual comprehension."² By populating nature with words and memories that we have attachment to, Macfarlane makes the landscape more important, understandable and fascinating. Being attached to the landscape around us at this moment in history is an urgent and necessary thing.

Nature writing is not always celebrated. As Richard Smyth writes:

[T]oo much modern nature writing bears the smudges of the writers' desperate groping for the mot juste. Page after page is dotted with too-carefully chosen 'lyrical' words: sluice, knapped, sintering, root-nooks, moiling, fust – perfectly fine words in themselves, of course, but their cumulative effect is to make the writing reek overpoweringly of the lamp. In parallel with this comes a clatter of namedropping, not of VIPs but of plant names and place names ... They have an evocative sound, but they are also, looked at squarely, jargon.³

Smyth's observations are not unfounded. Much modern nature writing has an emphasis on the descriptive, obscure and dramatic, and much of it comes from a white, British perspective, and might be accused of problematic nostalgia.

While nostalgia is potentially present – but not intentionally so – in the two writers that I focus on, Macfarlane and Macdonald, that is not what I chose to take from their work. Rather, I found a blend of memoir, travel diary and scientific journal. I found two writers who show how even in our modern, increasingly urban world, our stories are still interwoven with the natural world. Nature for them, and for me, may be an isolated mountain pass, a farm, a garden or the permeable way nature enters into the urban. For the sake of clarity, when I write of nature I mean the environment outside the confines of a dwelling – unless that dwelling is infused with the outside world. Nature as I define it does not have to exclude humanity, but it can exist outside of the influence of human culture – rare as that may be today.

I write about Macdonald and Macfarlane because in the reading of their books I have found myself observing my own attachment to landscape. Purely scientific writings can remove the humour and emotion from encounters with the world around us. But writers who love words as much as they love nature, as is the case with Macdonald and Macfarlane, highlight the humanity present in nature, even as they describe its sometimes alien essence. My attachment to landscape, and to the people who are part of those landscapes, is an essential feature of my paintings and illustrations. It is difficult to comprehend large landscapes. It is also difficult to comprehend global environmental collapse. However, a “common thread that unites the new nature writing is its exploration of the potential for human meaning-making not in the rare or exotic but in our everyday connections with the non-human natural world.”⁴ Observing, through the eyes of Macdonald and Macfarlane, the small moments in their home gardens, and in the parks near their homes, as well as their familiar landscapes to walk in, I came to realise that reconnecting to nature on a smaller scale makes nature more personal and intimate. Observing the ecosystems I can walk to, or take an easy drive to, means that the environment, the challenges that it faces, and my own attachment to it, is more approachable.

Macdonald's book, *H is for Hawk* (2014), is both a memoir depicting the author's grief after the death of her father and a love letter to her goshawk, Mabel. In one passage, Macdonald writes about her childhood garden, and we as readers can see how the natural world, sometimes characterised as unfamiliar, now becomes a map of memory and attachment:

It's a child's world, full of separate places. Give me a paper and pencil now and ask me to draw a map of the fields I roamed about when I was small, and I cannot do it. But change the question, and ask me to list what was there and I can fill pages. The wood ants' nest. The newt pond. The oak covered in marble galls. The birches by the motorway fence with fly agarics at their feet. These things were the waypoints of my world.⁵

The balance Macdonald strikes throughout most of her book is one I hope is present in my paintings and illustrations. I portray the natural world frequently, but it is never painted without a sense of narrative or human story attached to it. My painting, *The fences you make...* (2023) (Figure 2), portrays a friend tending to her hive alongside her classmates, and draws attention to the reliance bees now have on people. Honeybees are unable to survive in the wild without intervention if they are infected by varroa mites.

Much of the outdoor imagery in the picture-book *The Collector*, that I made as a part of my Masters, is based on memories of a park I frequented as a child and the valley suburb that I grew up in. For instance, much of the imagery in *Page twenty-four* (2022) (Figure 1) comes from a walk around Chingford Park, near where I grew up.

Macdonald's writing helps me to understand my attachment to and interconnectedness with landscape. She writes in *Vesper Flights* (2020) that “[l]iterature can teach us the qualitative texture of the world,” and “[w]e need to communicate the value of things, so that more of us might fight to save them.”⁶ As we come to know the natural world around us more intimately, so we attach value to it.

In the search for a connection to the world around me, the natural environment was not the only place where moments of attachment could be found. The everyday and the domestic is a space from which we can learn to see more clearly. The poet Billy Collins brings attention to quiet moments in his poem “Aimless Love” (2013).⁷



Figure 1. Pippi Miller; *Page twenty-four*, 2022, gouache on paper; 210x310mm. Collection of the artist.

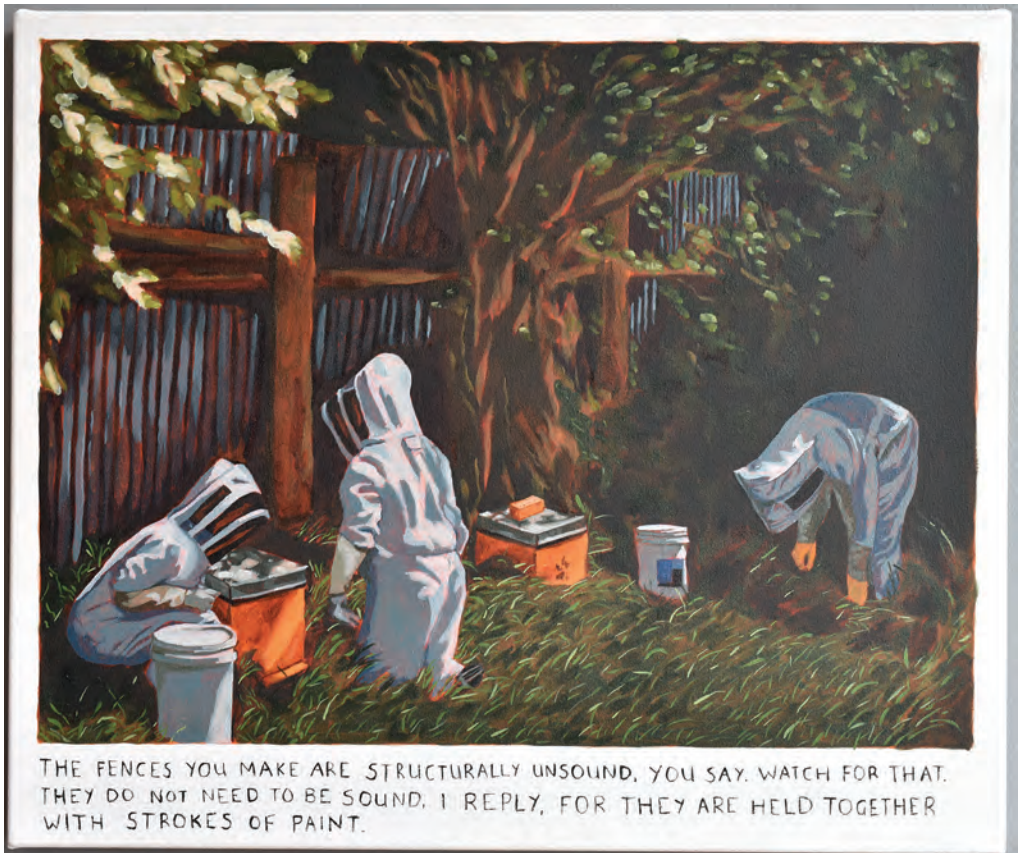


Figure 2. Pippi Miller; *The fences you make...*, 2023, oil on canvas, 700x585mm. Private collection.

When he speaks of noticing that wren by the lakeshore, he conveys the mindset that one must be in to notice such a bird. Collins makes me remember what it is like to look as you walk, to see the leaves on the trees, the rocks at the lakeshore, the lapping water and the wren. When he writes of the mouse the cat has dropped under the dining room table, Collins' language conveys the melancholy and regret felt after the moment of discovery. He does exclude the shock sometimes experienced when finding a cat's gory treasures (one, a dying mouse, I only discovered when putting on my shoe – the cat had dropped it inside, like the game we often played, dropping a ball of paper in a boot for him to fish out). In the final stanza, Collins evokes not only the visual moments of reverie to be found throughout the day, but also the sensations of touch and smell. He writes of feeling the soap turning in his wet hands, and catching from it the scent of "lavender and stone."⁸

While the poem is superficially about the love found in random happenstance, Collins contrasts it against the jagged love of human relationships. Just as personal attachment and memory can be found in the natural environment, so can the coincidental remind us of those we love. Collins bemoans the unkind words, suspicion and "silence on the telephone" to be found in romantic love.⁹ But I cannot help but feel that Collins' heart is not in his dismissal of human affection. He writes of the dead mouse, and the delicate wren, and the turbulent lover, but then goes on to say that his "heart is ... always propped up/ in a field on its tripod/ ready for the next arrow."¹⁰



Figure 3. Pippi Miller, *In the early hours of the morning...*, 2023,
 oil on canvas, 700x585mm. Collection of the artist.

As I walked through Joanna Margaret Paul's recent exhibition at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, "Imagined in the Context of a Room," I couldn't help but feel some of the same energy present in her work that I find in Collins' poetry. Paul's paintings capture the light falling in a room, a chair, some dishes, a horizon line, inventories of rooms, her pencil or brush outlining the small shrine she has seen in her world. Even if being present in our own domestic environments does not necessarily help us to address climate change, it guides us to find the beauty in the everyday, a habit which helps to combat ecological anxiety. After reading "Aimless Love," the smell of soap hits my nose more sharply and, after walking amongst Paul's works, the chair in the corner of the room next to the window draws my pencil down to the page, and the bright colours of my clothes hanging on the rail in my room catch my eye.

The work above, *In the early hours of the morning...* (Figure 3), was painted with my newfound observations of the domestic. The claustrophobia of the small room and the bright patterns of the clothes are both things that go unnoticed in the everyday, but which become precious through paint. The accompanying text brings absent people into the room, and makes the empty bed into a sickbed. Paul's work, too, is interspersed with the jagged (and loving) outlines and impressions of the important people in her life. Jeffrey Harris leans toward the viewer from the paper; moments from a young marriage collect on another sheet. A room sits apart from the rest of the exhibition, a shrine to a daughter who died young. Faces fade from her work as loves break down, but people remain present, if not clearly drawn. They are captured in the shirts of a wardrobe, or the empty space in the arms of a chair.

In particular, Paul's work *Untitled* (c1971), a pencil sketch of an armchair in the bay window of a villa, captures the absence and presence of people in a domestic space. The work is detailed in places that have drawn Paul's attention, and left blank in other spaces. The throw over the back of the armchair is resplendent with its black and white pattern of flowers and leaves. The folds of the fabric are shaded, a bowl of fruit catches the eye. Paul captures the natural in the domestic with equal detail – the view out the window of the villa is fully rendered – showing that perhaps the domestic is less separate from the outdoors than we might assume. As Greg Donson observed in his essay "The Garden Suburb and Beyond," Paul's attention claims "equal value for both the interior and the world outside."¹¹ While the armchair remains empty, evoking questions about who it might ordinarily seat, the artist's hands sneak into frame as they capture the image. The viewer can stand and place themselves in the position of the artist, perhaps imagining it is their hands that hold the pencil.

The writers, poet and artist I have written about have all taught me about my own sense of attachment to the landscapes I live in; domestic and wild, intimate and unknown. Macdonald intersperses the natural with the personal, so demonstrating how our own memories become intertwined with landscapes, making them significant to us. Macfarlane populates the world with words to describe places we have forgotten, showing that language and people help to make landscapes seem more real, present and important – something we urgently need in these days of ecological collapse. Collins, through well-chosen words, and Paul, through simplicity of line and colour choice, capture small moments of the domestic and the coincidental that show us how the banality of the everyday is also a landscape of attachment.

All four of these voices demonstrate that it is not the environment, words, the domestic or happenstance alone that sustains us. As relationships, lost or present, haunt the lives and works of writers, poets and artists, so do they haunt all of our lives and small moments. The sea pinks in my front garden remind me of my mother; the toes of a dead fledgling on my doormat remind me of my childhood cat; and out walking the other day, I only noticed the mānuka rippling like the sea at the urging of my friend, who pointed it out as we stood on a hillside bathed in evening light.

Pippi Miller is an artist and illustrator based in Dunedin. After studying English for some years at Otago University, she turned to the Dunedin School of Art. Emerging in 2023 with an MFA, Pippi is now working toward becoming a full-time creative.

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- 2 Simon Morley, *Writing on the Wall: Word and Image in Modern Art* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), 2003, 9.
- 3 Richard Smyth, "Plashy Fens: The Limitations of Nature Writing," *Times Literary Supplement*, 5849 (2015), 15.
- 4 Joe Moran, "A Cultural History of the New Nature Writing," *Literature & History*, 23:1 (2014), 50.
- 5 Helen Macdonald, *H is for Hawk* (London: Vintage, 2014), 141.
- 6 Helen Macdonald, *Vesper Flights* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2020), ix.
- 7 Billy Collins, *Aimless Love: New and Selected Poems* (London: Picador, 2013), 9.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 9.
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- 11 Greg Donson, "The Garden Suburb and Beyond," in *Joanna Margaret Paul: Imagined in the Context of a Room*, eds Lauren Gutsell and Lucy Hammonds (Dunedin: Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 2021), 69-88.

NAKED CLAY AND THE AGEING OF LITTLE RED

Bronwyn Gayle

ONCE UPON A TIME

In my MFA exhibition "The Ageing of Little Red," I used toy-like objects and fairytale narrative as a means of subconsciously and intuitively exploring personal realities. Both toys and fairytales are ubiquitous in human historical and contemporary experience, and are observed across many cultures. Embracing this commonality of experience allowed me to transition from personal contemplation towards a relevant discourse with a contemporary audience. This process centred on interspecies relationships with emphasis on ageing, loss and grief.

The romanticised rocking horse (Figures 1 and 2) and the reality of caring for an ageing horse, Pepper (Figure 3) provided the anchor for the organic development of ideas developed in this body of work. My connection with the rocking horse as a nostalgic childhood toy inspired me to review my lifelong relationships with equines, from childhood toy to adult paddock companion. The ceramic and glass pieces created for this project were inspired by toys and what toys represent, with continuous reference to toy horses.

A girl in a red hooded dress and red shoes stands alongside a rocking horse (Figure 1). The clothing is inextricably bound to the Red Riding Hood fairytale, as well as the many other fairytales which focus on red shoes. This coincidence meant that I was compelled to investigate the fairytale phenomenon. When exploring the realm of fairytale, another essential character emerged, the 'Big Bad' or 'Evil Old.' This ominous character figuring in so many fairytales embodies fear and adversity. Three recurring characters, the Equine Companion, the Big Bad/Evil Old and Little



Figure 1 & 2. Childhood photograph.

Red, became vehicles for examining the nature of fear and its evolution, from childhood monsters through the changing face of fear in maturity, adulthood and old age. The surreal nature of fairytales, with their iconic but one-dimensional characters, combined with toys and the access toys provide to the liminal space of play and memory, created a fertile structure through which to explore my subconscious.

This project focused on human/equine interactions and dependencies which arose directly from personal experience and contemplation. These encounters provided a small window into larger human/non-human relationships. The representation of equines developed from the infant's need to feel warmth and security, through childish fantasies born of escapism, toward the understanding of equines as individuals and all the complexities this embraces. Because this growth in understanding revealed the extent humanity has played in the mistreatment of equines, my developing Little Red character is forced to question whether it is she who is the Big Bad/Evil Old. Along with this new perception came the recognition of the Big Bad/Evil Old shared by both Little Red and her Equine Companion – mortality, the most ancient of Evil Olds. The threads of this project's story, beginning with a photo and utilising toy and fairytale narratives, are concretised in clay expressions of the unconscious fever dream and the consideration of mortality.

THE EQUINE AND THE MONSTER EMERGING

Over the course of the project, Little Red's steadfast companion morphs like an equine Pinocchio from a generic child's toy into an individual creature. The equine in toy and fairytale became a vehicle with which to explore historical perceptions and experiences of human/equine relationships. These perceived realities are coloured by historical precedents and individual experiences. Alexander Nevzorov states: "By any stretch of the imagination, it is very difficult to find a subject more steeped in deception than the relationship of man and horse."¹



Figure 3. Pepper and the author. Photograph: Denise Cone, 2021.



Figure 4. Bronwyn Gayle, *Infant Red and the Call of the Cloak*, 2020-22, saggar-fired clay, wood, cast glass and re-imagined metal additions on bespoke bookshelf plinth. Ceramic pony approx. 400mm height.



Figure 5. Bronwyn Gayle, *The Entanglement Before the Fall*, triptych, 2021-22, sagger-fired clay, cast glass and found objects on bespoke bookshelf plinths.

Australian artist and writer Madeleine Boyd uses Karen Barad's term 'intra-action' to describe multispecies entanglements as "mutual emergence and transformation."² A horse who is humanised and an equestrian, on the one hand, are different from an undomesticated horse and an 'un-equined' human, on the other: Both must adapt their nature/culture and adjust their ways of being to communicate successfully with each other: With a 6,000-year history between us, the equine is instrumental in who we have become, not only through human/equine collision, but through thousands of individual intimacies.

My relationship with equines may have started with a toy rocker; but it became centred around my horses, the most influential being Pepper, a Standardbred who died while I was finishing my Master's exhibition. Whether intentional or not, all my depictions of equines are influenced by my relationship with Pepper, and all my interactions with and responses to equine art are influenced by what I have learned and continue to learn from her.

Humanity has a history of hiding behind the cultural normalisation of brutality towards non-humans. From the equine perspective, human individuals, or humans who are complicit in the agencies which create fear and anxiety, provide the obvious starting point for depictions of the equine equivalent of the Big Bad. My creative journey has revealed inconvenient truths not only about my personal relationship to horses, but also about the greater human/non-human divide. The focus of this project is not a broad multispecies overview, but instead a personal reconsideration with wide-ranging implications. My developing Little Red character is forced to challenge her accepted human/non-human relationships and so begins to question whether it is she who is the Big Bad/Evil Old. As this reality settles within their relationship, another mutual Big Bad/Evil Old asserts itself, as both human and equine are dealing with the signs of ageing and mortality. As an artist who is primarily a potter, all these considerations culminated in not only re-examining my memories and understanding of perceived truth, but re-examining my relationship with clay.

BURNT EARTH

Why would a potter shift away from the process of glazing, a process which is so significant to the history of the medium? On initial assessment, denying glaze appears to halve the creativity and practice of pottery. However, naked clay,³ fired but unglazed, offers a distinct visual and tactile sensation. Fired clay without the covering of glaze evokes a different response to that of traditional glazed ceramic. It speaks directly about the clay medium and the firing process, and there is an immediacy between the hand-builder as maker and the clay. There is also a sense of vulnerability created for the viewer by the object, which lacks the barrier of a glaze. To lower my environmental impact as a potter, I began experimenting with alternative colouring and patination methods, as well as lowering firing temperatures, while still achieving the desired clay strength. These decisions led me towards the realm of saggar firing. And then saggar firing took me on its own journey.

The saggar firing technique developed in this project is an amalgam of historical and contemporary experimental techniques. Traditionally, this firing process involved placing a clay item in a saggar (clay container), which provided an internal atmosphere protected from the flame in the kiln. In contrast, contemporary saggars often contain combustibles which are intended to create colour on the item inside. My saggar containers are formed by layers of slip, cardboard and paper. They are finished with layers of fairytale book pages. The process of forming the saggar boxes and wrapping the sculptures in combustibles has become as important as creating the sculptures they contain.

The combustibles chosen for my firing include horse dung, horse hair and waste hay. These items speak directly of the practicalities of caring for horses – not the aesthetics of the horse lover's calendar, but instead the result of caring for real rather than imagined horses, placing value on the mundane and the discarded. Other combustibles include seaweed and seashells from beaches on which Pepper and I both escaped our mental and physical confinements and grew to know and trust each other. Some contributions to the saggar-firing process, notably dung and seaweed, reliably left their mark through the interaction between clay and fuming combustibles. However, other flammables, such



Figure 6. Bronwyn Gayle, *Trike*, 2022, saggar-fired clay, wood, string and re-imagined metal additions, approx. 550mm height.



Figure 7. Bronwyn Gayle, 2022, pre-fired and wrapped ceramic pony from *Infant Red*, with drawings.



Figure 8. Bronwyn Gayle, pre-fired saggars with drawings, 2021.



Figure 9. Bronwyn Gayle, post-fired saggars and *Equine Friend*, 2021.

as hair collected from grooming, provided soft, secure nests within which the fragile clay piece inside could be transported safely to the kiln, but left no long-term visual presence on the fired piece. These non-marking combustibles remained essential, albeit in a more personal and esoteric sense.

My saggar process has developed from a physical method of firing clay into a significant and lengthy contemplative ritual: individually wrapping each ceramic piece in carefully considered combustibles, placing them in boxes made specifically for them and, finally, wrapping each box in layers of clay, paper and pages from fairytale stories. The result carries the potential to act as a kind of "sympathetic magic."⁴ James George Frazer's theory of sympathetic magic includes the "law of similarity," whereby an image created in the deliberate and considered likeness of another creates a connection between the two, and the "law of contagion," involving the use of a physical substance which was once part of the individual to which a connection is desired. In this project, the equine forms follow the law of similarity and the horse hair; waste hay and dung follow the law of contagion. The saggar containers themselves are wrapped in pages of fairytale storybooks, not just to acknowledge their inspiration, but in an alchemical attempt to bind the creations they contain to the realm of fairytale and perhaps to the realm of 'ever after'.

Susan Stewart also refers to sympathetic magic, but in relation to the miniature object: "When the miniature exists simply as a representation, it functions as sympathetic magic; when it is enclosed with a lock of hair; a piece of ribbon, or some other object that is 'part' of the other, it functions as contagious magic."⁵ Representations or objects need not, however, be miniatures to influence or become bound to what they represent. My hollow fairytale characters, fired within pages of a storybook, wrapped in horse hair and partially buried in horse dung, not only chronicle their firing history through their surface, but encapsulate the law of similarity and the law of contagion, which are the essence of sympathetic magic.

Modern vestiges of sympathetic magic include photos in wallets, the retention of locks of hair and the wearing of clothes of a missing or deceased loved one to keep them close.⁶ People more often turn to sympathetic magic in times when they feel anxiety, believing they



Figure 10. Bronwyn Gayle, *The Conflicted Chronicles of Grown Red*, 2021-22, saggar-fired clay, wood, string, cast glass and re-imagined found additions on bespoke bookshelf plinths.



have little or no control over aspects of their life or the life of a loved one.⁷ My fairytale saggar containers bind personal equine tales of an increasingly distant past and an uncertain future together with historical fairytales, giving personal experiences a shared history and a mode of expression.

The wrapped saggar firing technique celebrates uncontrolled marks left by smoke and flame, as well as colours that emerge through the process rather than being carefully applied as a glaze mask. In seeing these contingent surfaces, the audience is drawn into the making process; the finished piece is not clean and distant, but immediate and apparent; colour has been added to the pieces through the process itself, rather than being carefully applied as a glaze mask.

Figure 11. Bronwyn Gayle, *The Conflicted Chronicles of Grown Red* (detail), 2020, saggar-fired clay, wood, string, cast glass and re-imagined metal additions.

ENDINGS

"The Ageing of Little Red" explores the nature of anxiety through the guise of toy-like objects and fairytale narrative. Toy-like objects are placed in scenarios intended to evoke a questioning unease. These creations are not pristine, nor will they wash clean. They have been through fire and bear the scars of their making. They are haunted by ill-defined fears which remain featureless and can never be truly subjugated. Some are deliberately posed, while others lie seemingly discarded and forgotten. Or perhaps they have sprung to life, playing their own games, only to be frozen in play the moment they are looked at, like a game of 'freeze-tag,' or the primal fear that inanimate things move in the dark but become motionless and safe in the light.

I started this project with childhood photos and let them take me on a journey into memory and dream. I knew this voyage would utilise the imagery of that girl in her red hooded dress and her equine friend, but I did not know what else they would reveal. The fairytale and the toy bring their own meaning, their ubiquitous nature imbued with emotional resonance. I adopted them also as vehicles with which to explore ageing, at a time when life has become more reflection than future. The objects access a liminal realm, revealing layers of fear, anxiety and ultimately grief.

My Ageing Red, her memories questioned or failing, is being devoured by internal shadow and is lost in the darkness cast by the fairytale forest – a future she must learn to embrace. By wandering in the Deep Dark Woods of fairytale, home comfort vanishes, familiarity and continuity are replaced by the dark and the unknown. In this place of contemplation and transition, we begin to haunt ourselves. In the creative process also, there is sometimes reason not to project or interpret, but instead to embrace the ambiguous. This response invites mute conversation, offers only questions and opens closed boxes. As Rebecca Solnit says: "We know less when we erroneously think we know than when we recognize that we don't."⁸



Figure 12. Bronwyn Gayle, IV *Hobby Horse*, approx. 540mm height. Part of the triptych, *The Entanglement Before the Fall*, 2021-22, saggar-fired clay, cast glass and found objects.



Figure 13. Bronwyn Gayle, *Swing*, 2022, saggar-fired clay, wood, rope.

Bronwyn Gayle lives in Dunedin, Aotearoa. After many years working as a full time clay sculptor she returned to Dunedin School of Art to complete a masters of fine Arts in 2022. She has recently concentrated on saggar fired clay techniques in combination with cast glass and found objects. Her focus is on human/non-human entanglement and loss, and she is fascinated by toys, personal, contemporary, historic and ancient.

- 1 Alexander Nevzorov, *The Horse Crucified and Risen* (Charleston, NC: Nevzorov Haute École, 2011), 8.
- 2 Madeleine Boyd, "Towards a Performative Multispecies Aesthetic," *Antennae: Multispecies Intra-action*, 31 (Spring 2015), 9-28.
- 3 A term I have gleaned from Jane Perryman, notably her book *Naked Clay: Ceramics without Glaze* (London: A&C Black, 2004).
- 4 James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1906).
- 5 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 126.
- 6 Eugene Subbotky, "The Belief in Magic in the Age of Science," *SAGE Open*, 4:1 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014521433>.
- 7 Colin Dickey, "Very Superstitious: The science of sympathetic magic, and why it persists," *Lapham's Quarterly*, Vol. 5, 3 Summer 2012 <https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/magic-shows/very-superstitious>
- 8 Rebecca Solnit, "Woolf's Darkness: Embracing the Inexplicable," *New Yorker*, 24 April 2014, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/woolfs-darkness-embracing-the-inexplicable>.



Figure 14. Bronwyn Gayle, *The Entanglement Before the Fall*, detail, 2021-22, saggar-fired clay, cast glass and found objects on bespoke bookshelf plinths.

UNDERTONE

Eva Ding

It's like a feeling of incompleteness, with a sense of satisfaction from partially achieving something, yet also a sense of regret for not fully satisfying oneself with the work. It's also like a feeling of embarking on a journey, where the road ahead is dark and cold, and the destination is not even visible, yet one is unwilling to stop and settle down, afraid of missing out on the scenery. I completed my Bachelor of Visual Arts in 2022, and to my surprise I felt little excitement inside, perhaps because I already knew I would continue into postgraduate study in 2023.

AN OLD MOVIE

An earlier turning point came in late 2021 with a meeting with Dunedin School of Art, sculpture lecturer Michele Beevors. It was a stroke of luck. Although I had already tried using clay to sculpt body parts like hands or feet, I hadn't explored why I was so obsessed with traditional figurative sculpture. When Michele asked if I wanted to pursue it the following year, things clicked into place.

I had no idea what I wanted to do at that time. It was a constant process of discovery through trials and failures in practice. From focusing on myself, sculpting myself and reflecting on myself, I placed myself back into this world to explore my relationship with it.

Everything just happened naturally. The past year's experiences were like rewatching an old black-and-white movie from 30 years ago: I saw the old brick house where I spent my childhood; my grandmother who was always busy running around doing chores; my grandfather who sat silently on the sofa, but got everything under control; my mother who was crying every day after getting divorced; my father who was talented and strategic; and the various women who were like moths to a flame fluttering around him. Since then, 'gender' has been a concept in my mind – very clearly. In a Chinese family under patriarchal ideology, there is nothing more conspicuous than the concept of gender: I am a girl, and one day I will grow up to please men, bear children, serve my husband and work hard to manage the household.

There are voices deep-rooted in traditional culture in Chinese society – such as “It's better to marry well than to study well” and “A woman without talent is virtuous” – which have been echoing in my ears like a spell for decades. For many years, I have been puzzled by a seemingly unsolvable question: In traditional culture, as a woman in China, where should I establish a sense of existence and self-confidence? Is it really that, as women, we are meant to compete with each other as to who can seduce men better; who can bear more children and who can better serve our husbands?

It wasn't until last year, when I read my first English article on feminism for a reading assignment,¹ that I realised, as a woman, that I had never truly understood feminism all these years. And then, my graduation thesis and artwork focused on women's issues, exploring gender inequality faced by contemporary Chinese women in a traditionally patriarchal society. Since I started studying feminism, I have felt like I have found my lifebuoy, helping to integrate all my past confusion and doubts into art practice and expressing them through my artworks.

TWISTED STEEL BAR

Living in a country with a culture and political system utterly different from my homeland, I have been reflecting on the relationship between the individual and society through my life experiences. Although I have been living in New Zealand for nine years, as a Chinese person, I am constantly concerned about the development of my motherland in all aspects. It has been a long time since I last visited China. Still, from what my friends have told me, my hometown has undergone significant changes, with towering buildings, bustling shops, rapid technological advancement and all kinds of material needs being met. People seem to be finally living a life of material abundance and happiness.

However, I am not at all interested in these things. I am more curious about whether every ordinary individual should bear the overwhelming burden of nationalist pride. Where should we place ourselves in the collective? How can we express our spiritual desires and needs?

Under the influence of globalisation, the explosive spread of online social media has made the young generation in China unable to resist the profound impact of foreign cultures. At the same time, they are also influenced by a strong sense of nationalism, which breeds hostility and criticism towards cultures that are perceived as different. This dual social personality is like a giant steel bar being twisted and pulled in opposite directions. I fear that this bar will snap eventually.

As for women in China, where do they stand amidst this cultural wave? Although I have seen more and more young women becoming independent and assertive, I also sense the tension in intergenerational relationships. The so-called excellent quality of being a good wife and mother, passed down for thousands of years, still hangs like a dark cloud over society. Therefore, many women choose not to marry, to escape the fate expected by their parents and elders. They still face multiple questions and criticisms as they continue to live within the scope of social opinion and morality.

Due to the thousands of years of influence of Confucianism in feudal China, today's gendered cultural environment lacks the nurturing ground for feminism to thrive. Groups and individual feminist artists in post-socialist globalised China have striven for equal gender status, refusing to renounce their feminist identity. As a result, they are often regarded as marginal and alternative.² Contemporary Chinese art has many hidden corners that need to be discovered and unfolded to convincingly address gender issues.³ Female artists exploring women's issues are few and far between, and many of them have interrupted their careers to become wives and mothers. Moreover, the widespread appreciation of outstanding contemporary artworks – such as *99 Needles* (2002) and *Opening The Great Wall* (2001) by He Chengyao, and *Your Body* (2004) and *Open* (2006) by Xiang Jing – are still facing obstacles from traditional cultural stereotypes about female bodies and sexuality.

A traditional culture undergoing development is like a set of armour. While it protects every individual, it is also heavy, clumsy and restricts the freedom of the body and soul for those who want to run bravely. I consider myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to choose to live in another country, to understand, adapt and embrace different cultures and social systems, and to re-examine and reflect on my own identity while questioning established norms. At the same time, I have become more and more aware that I need to continue practicing art, because I still have unresolved issues related to feminism and female status in China. I yearn to keep exploring and searching for answers.

WRITTEN IN THE STARS

I remember when I was young, there was always a traditional daily hand-torn calendar hanging on the wall of my home, filled with the blessings and curses of the superstitious elements. It felt like the fate of one's entire life was written on it. Every day, my grandmother would tear off a page, ritually discarding the past and welcoming the present.



Figure 1. Traditional daily hand-torn calendar from China.



Figure 2. Loaded kiln with clay body pieces, ready to fire.

I have always believed that materials carry potent messages and are crucial to art. In this way, I have chosen to use this traditional hand-torn calendar as my primary material, hoping to find a connection to my childhood memories. Although this type of calendar is no longer popular amongst younger urbanites who believe in taking control of their own lives, I want to convey the impact of destiny into my works and empathise with the fates of Chinese women entrenched in tradition.

Initially, in my Bachelor of Visual Arts project, I attempted to make papier mâché sculptures using the calendar pages. However, fellow ceramic artist Bronwyn Gayle, with whom I shared a studio, encouraged me to incorporate ceramic elements into my work. Her art practice involved a unique saggar-firing technique, using layered paper and cardboard coated with clay slip, in which she then fired her work, together with other organic materials. I was fascinated by this process, and the clay boxes she used, which turned into ceramic layers resembling paper after firing. Also inspiring was the work of Bahamian-born American artist Janine Antoni, who practices feminist performance art and sculpture, often utilising her own body. Antoni's *Saddle* (2010) is a cowhide mould of the artist's body in a kneeling position.

As a result of her influence, I cast plaster moulds of my body and made many body parts, then tore off the calendar pages, coated them with clay slip and layered them onto the body models. This created greenware made of a mixture of clay and calendar paper, which I then fired in an oxidation environment at 1200 degrees Celsius. The calendar turned to ashes in the kiln, leaving only the paper-thin ceramic body fragments, which, in tandem with intervals of negative space, represented a body profile.

The final piece featured three women wearing traditional red wedding headscarves made from collaged calendar pages. The bases were made using the same method as the sculptural forms. Through the hollow bodies of these vulnerable figures, I reveal the fate of Chinese women, just like my grandmother; whose fate seemed predetermined from the day she got married.



Figure 3. Eva Ding 囡 (nān), 2022, ceramic, metal, magnet, paper; wood and fabric.
 Three female figures are represented in standing, bending and sitting positions.
 Dimensions: standing: 600x1750x600mm; sitting: 800x1400x600mm; bending: 600x900x700mm.

Eva Ding is currently studying her honours degree in sculpture at Dunedin School of Art. Her art practice focuses on the Chinese women's gender status in cultural traditions as well as in the development of the globalised modernity. Her process of approaching Feminism reflects her intersected identities as an immigration living in New Zealand for nine years.

- 1 Catherine Grant, "Fans of Feminism: Re-writing Histories of Second-wave Feminism in Contemporary Art," *Oxford Art Journal*, 34:2 (2011), 265-86.
- 2 Cui Shuqin, *Gendered Bodies – Toward a Women's Visual Art in Contemporary China* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 6-7.
- 3 Monica Merlin, "Gender (Still) Matters in Chinese Contemporary Art," *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, 6:1 (2019), 5-15.

UNPICKING THE BLANKET – ESCAPING THE BED WE WERE MADE TO LIE IN

Lissie Brown

INTRODUCTION

The final exhibition for my MFA was about relationships and womanhood. The themes explored in this body of work were born out my own experiences as a daughter, wife, mother and woman. I also drew upon the stories and accounts of others, gathered while researching and reflecting upon the complexities of historical attitudes towards women, and the issues around gender inequality that still exist today.

As I hand-stitched blankets into body parts and explored drawing on a large scale, I became immersed in the constantly evolving narratives that emerged during the process. I gained a sense of my own agency, perhaps for the first time ever, as this body of work is a gathering of objects that speaks directly to personal experience. This study has allowed me to look inwards in relation to the outward commands that I had been taught to live by. I have unpicked my own stitches, using as a starting point the threads of stories that have become woven into the installations in this exhibition, a platform from which discussion and debate over the plight of contemporary women can continue.



Figure 1. Lissie Brown, *Fruit*, 2023, exhibition installation. Mixed media. Photograph: Pam McKinlay.

BEGINNINGS

The project began with an investigation into the lives of my female ancestors, through which I discovered a host of strong-minded, intelligent and independent women. Generational associations are instrumental in shaping our beliefs and approaches to life, with each generation unwittingly throwing a blanket of their experiences onto the next. It is important to acknowledge that we carry forward ripples from the past, while also being informed by events and opinions specific to our own time.

Much has been written on the topics of womanhood and the maternal. Judith Butler suggests that motherhood can be seen as performative, an action with no clear distinctions or boundaries to establish a definitive whole.¹ Susan Stewart states that the “maternal” is not only inherent in women,² while Julia Kristeva challenges the contemporary understanding of motherhood, describing it as self-limiting: “by turning all our attention on the biological and social aspects of motherhood as well as on sexual freedom and equality, we have become the first civilization which *lacks a discourse on the complexity of motherhood.*”³

My research investigated the cultural constructs of patriarchal societies and feminist action, which continue to shape women's lives today. While women are embracing their feminist identities with renewed and mediated visibility, manipulation and control remains ingrained in our cultural norms, though presented with such nuanced subtlety that it regularly goes unnoticed.

Contemporary art can be used as a forum to draw attention to ideas and issues across different domains. Vivian Lynn has been a major influence on my practice, as she frequently addressed matters of gender in her work. Exploring subjects that spoke to the patriarchal, cultural, feminist and biological,⁴ Lynn initiated both cultural and personal responses that questioned the ideological representation and treatment of women within Western patriarchal culture. I have also looked beyond the traditional – not just looking through the lens of things, but also *between* things, questioning the purpose of patterns of existence, belief structures and identification markers that are used as means to shape attitudes, opinions and behaviours in regard to gender.

DEATH OF A WOMAN – THE UNPICKING

The day for installing my exhibition arrived, and friends helped transport, carry and hang the works. Things shifted and moved, perspectives and meanings around arrangements that had been decided previously were challenged. Unexpected relationships between pieces arose and had to be considered regarding placement of the works. I have been influenced by the artwork of Cathy Wilkes and Juan Muñoz, who both create tableaux that allow for intimate relationships to occur between the figures and objects in a work, which nonetheless remain isolated within the whole.



Figure 2. Lissie Brown, *Fruit*, detail, 2023, exhibition installation. Mixed media. Photograph: Lissie Brown.



Figure 3. Lissie Brown, *Fruit*, detail, 2023, exhibition installation. Mixed media. Photograph: Pam McKinlay.

This was the first time I had seen the entire body of work gathered together. My friends left, realising I needed time by myself to engage with works that had been so personal in their making. This time alone allowed for reflection on what the work meant to me. I moved things around, added and removed objects, considering the whole while also addressing how each tableau sat within the overall installation. During this time, my writing supervisor arrived; her reaction positive, we ran through my presentation and she left. Later, my practice supervisor came and, after casting an expert eye over the layout, adjusted a few pieces. Finally, picking up the apple that I had placed close to the central figure, she wandered around considering options, finally dropping it some distance from the rest of the installation. Suddenly everything seemed to fit. I learnt so much that day about myself, about curating a body of work and, most importantly, that this was not so much an individual endeavour as a collective effort encased in the friendship, care and support offered by others.

Blankets are the primary material used in this project. A well-used blanket is soft and worn and speaks of use by humanity. Children have been swaddled in them, people and their pets have slept on them, they have been laughed and cried on. Blankets provide security, warmth and love. Much like human skin, they become tougher or thinner depending on how they have been treated. I have used second-hand blankets as a way of acknowledging the relationship between the physical and the emotional.

The colour palette, ranging from cream through to deep red, refers to flesh and bone, addressing both the fragility of life and the abject nature of the subject matter. Hand-stitching human body parts out of woollen blankets speaks of comfort and horror in the same breath, while also acknowledging women's toil and manual labour, both historically and in contemporary society.

On entering the exhibition, the viewer encounters a series of installations that are neither interactive nor immersive. The central focus shifts as the visitor moves among the works; singular objects are part of larger narratives, reinforcing the theme of womanhood that runs throughout. Attention is drawn to the spaces between, where fragments of untold stories are suspended in time. Invited in to grasp part but not all of the story, the visitor is able to fill in the gaps with their own experiences while also considering the lives of others.

Central to the exhibition is a figure representative of a woman laid bare, her abdomen an open wound, where the womb, the nurturer of life, should be. One side of her



Figure 4. Lissie Brown, *Death of a Woman*, 2023. Mixed media. Photograph: Pam McKinlay.



Figure 5. Lissie Brown, *Cleanliness Is Next To Godliness*, 2023, exhibition installation. Mixed media. Photograph: Pam McKinlay.



Figure 6. Lissie Brown, *Eve*, 2023, exhibition installation. Mixed media. Photograph: Lissie Brown.

body has been flayed, yet she does not appear to be in pain. Balanced on a small table, she cannot escape the visitor's gaze, but refuses to engage, staring into space, lost in her own thoughts. Occupying the surrounding space, a fetus nestles in the safety of a womb which doubles as a protective blanket; a placenta hangs on the gallery wall and scattered across the floor are flayed breasts of all shapes and sizes. These objects are connected to the central figure by an umbilical cord, and represent actants that have power over the lives of women.⁵ The installation, *Fruit*, explores the relationship between a woman and her body, and is intended as a starting point for discussion around the realities of motherhood and the violence that exists within the physicality of giving birth.

As a child, I visited the WD Trotter Anatomy Museum at the University of Otago with my father, and spent many hours drawing the human organs on display. A recent introduction to the waxworks of La Specola rekindled my fascination with the human body and has been instrumental in the development of this body of work.⁶ The remarkably accurate reproductions of both male and female anatomy, created in eighteenth-century Italy, are a bizarre mix of scientific analysis and romanticised celebrations of womanhood. They are both disturbingly abject and fascinatingly beautiful.

Julia Kristeva offers insight into the abject in relation to motherhood, providing an important link into my investigation of the relationship between mother and child: "Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationships, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be."⁷ The assault on and physicality of a woman's body giving birth is often overlooked for more romanticised versions of motherhood. I recall my mother telling me that being pregnant was wonderful and while the act of giving birth did hurt to some degree, the joy of becoming a mother made all the pain worthwhile. She was only talking about physical pain. There was no mention of the psychological challenges women face when becoming mothers, particularly those who struggle under the pressures loaded on them by society. By exploring the functionality of the human body, both physically and psychologically, and placing the concrete and explainable alongside the emotional, I am presenting women as human beings rather than gender-based objects of Western patriarchal expectations.

Working closely on the central figure of *Fruit*, I was so immersed in healing my own personal trauma that I became immune to the reality that the idea of a partially flayed woman, no matter the context, is disturbing. Stitched up, pulled apart and exposed, this figure is part of a larger installation that explores both the corporeal and psychological, blending the performative with the personal, inviting the viewer to connect on a variety of levels. The range of emotions and reactions invoked by this figure was overwhelming. Some were horrified, shocked, disturbed; others cried, hugged and thanked me.



Figure 7. Lissie Brown, *Fruit*, 2023, exhibition installation. Mixed media. Photograph: Pam McKinlay.



Figure 8. Lissie Brown, *Fruit*, 2023, exhibition installation. Mixed media. Photograph: Pam McKinlay.



Figure 9. Lissie Brown, *Fruit, detail of fetus*, 2023, exhibition installation. Mixed media. Photograph: Lissie Brown.



Figure 10. Lissie Brown, *Fruit detail of flayed breasts*, 2023, exhibition installation. Mixed media. Photograph: Lissie Brown.



Figure 11. Lissie Brown, *Death of a Woman*, 2023, Exhibition image. Mixed media. Photograph: Pam McKinlay.

The serpent rising out of her abdomen, hovering ominously, ready to strike, drew many questions from visitors. Had the serpent taken possession of her? Was it instrumental in drawing attention to the plight of women in regard to the maternal and the domestic? Was the threat of the serpent's strike preventing her from stepping outside the social conventions of acceptable female behaviour? This led to many thought-provoking and enlightening discussions about the perception of women within Western culture.

The apple is seemingly a minor player in the installation, placed some distance from the central figure, but its presence is important as it represents both temptation and the desire for a life beyond motherhood. Laden with symbolism, it also references the fragility of our existence on this planet and the consequences of physical, mental and spiritual action.

The clusters of flayed breasts, initially intended as support pieces for the larger works, held their own in a way I had not expected. People wandered among them, some reminded of flower gardens, others of sea anemones. They became relevant as works in their own right, while also leading visitors into and through the exhibition.

Every woman's narrative is personal, and I am addressing this reality in a subtle way through this installation. The empty abdomen of the central figure not only acknowledges those women who have had children, but also those who cannot or choose not to, as well as the gender diverse – in other words, anyone that identifies as female, whatever their experience in relation to motherhood.

Kristeva describes the "passionate violence of the maternal experience" as not subject to social manipulation, but rather as a conquest that derives from the role taken on when becoming a mother.⁸ Any ingrained desire to have a child or be a mother is a fabrication – conveniently portrayed through the construction of greater social needs and expectations – and is not instinctive in all women. The maternal can be a positive experience, triggering a love that lasts a lifetime, while others feel a loss of personal identity and self. I am peeling back the layers that constitute our perceptions of womanhood, questioning why we still view women through a narrow lens.

Visitors wandering among the breast flowers are led to a smaller installation, dominated by a large breast swaying ominously above a small male putto. By including the putto, an angelic winged infant that possesses elements of the trickster; I am drawing attention to the subtle manipulation and control over women within society. Complicated multi-layered characters with hidden complexities, putti represent the interplay between genders: the dependency of the child on the mother and the maternal influence that lingers long after the child has left the home environment.

Here, the putto is reminiscent of a decorative garden ornament, dwarfed by the breast that symbolises the power and strength of womanhood. His skin is adorned with images relating to domestic life, motherhood and romantic love. Imprisoned by a ball and chain, unable to escape the sins of his past, he has made his bed and now he must lie on it.

Entitled *Inexplicable*, this tableau refers to men's attempt to place specific identity markers on women, in an effort to control and understand them. However, women cannot be explained away, as no matter what approaches and methods are used in attempts to do so, women remain entirely inexplicable and themselves.

Lying abandoned on the ground nearby are a belt (reminiscent of one that hung in our kitchen, a constant reminder of what was to come if my brother or I stepped out of line) and a ragdoll. Pertinent here is Jane Bennett's theory of material vitality or "thing power," from the perspective of the maternal, whereby inanimate objects are part of assemblages producing effects that go beyond the realm of their singularity.⁹ Here, I am drawing attention to the way seemingly insignificant everyday objects can have power over the lives of women. Dolls, given to young girls as toys, allude to the stereotypical role of women as mothers; they are actants in the journey towards motherhood.

A girl stands close by, having discarded the doll and the belt. Spat out from the domestic vagina, she remains attached by umbilical cord to a giant sink plug, tied to the kitchen sink and the expectations that are placed on women from birth. A plug is a useful tool preventing water draining from a sink, but it can also symbolise an inability to escape domestic life. *Cleanliness is Next to Godliness* is a very personal installation, as the girl represents myself suspended between childhood and adulthood, still tied to mother's apron strings but desperate to explore my own autonomy. The gymslip speaks of institutions such as high schools, for me a place of bullying and isolation within the confines of a convent education. Here I am alluding to Michel Foucault's and Jia Tolentino's discussions of manipulation and control in relation to ritualistic movement, habit and familiarity.¹⁰

Gazing outward towards a future free from the world of high-school rules, religious indoctrination and parental expectation, I encounter, on the facing wall, a world that is the stuff of nightmares. When exploring options for placement of the drawing, *Links in the Chain of Causation*, it made sense that it was positioned in a way that allowed the visitor to explore its relationship to *Godliness is Next to Cleanliness*.

Created from the perspective of my mother's experiences, which included teenage years spent fighting in World War II before immigrating to Aotearoa to start a new life, this work is about generational and societal influence. In the central panel, my mother stares out, inviting the viewer in, acting as the social conscience within a narrative that suggests that



Figure 12. Lissie Brown, *Inexplicable*, 2023, exhibition installation. Mixed media. Photograph: Pam McKinlay.



Figure 13. Lissie Brown, *Inexplicable detail* 2023, exhibition installation. Mixed media. Photograph: Pam McKinlay.



Figure 14. Lissie Brown, *Death of a Woman*, 2023, Exhibition image. Mixed media. Photograph: Lissie Brown.

life is not always what it seems. The work draws on Susan Stewart's theory of the miniature and gigantic, whereby, once we leave the miniature, the experiences we have grown up with blinker our view of the gigantic; in other words, our partial view is coloured by influences from the miniature.¹¹ Applying this to my own life, I realise that the problematic relationship I had with my mother while living at home greatly influenced my ability to trust women as an adult.

Done using graphite pencil and ink, *Links in the Chain of Causation* is filled with cluttered imagery that bypasses the niceties of life. It has a nightmarish quality and addresses the unspoken cruelties of everyday existence. Putti are trapped in a pit that is guarded by the flayed figure of Botticelli's Venus, whose skin hangs ominously overhead. Women swing from meat hooks attached to puppeteers' strings. Surreal images of distortion and imagination are evident throughout, and many of the objects represented in this work are repeated and come to life in the sculptural installations. Frequently addressing issues pertaining to women, using bizarre and distorted realism, surrealist Dorothea Tanning's original and innovative approach to her subject matter has been influential in giving me permission to express my own ideas with greater freedom and confidence, particularly in relation to narratives about human behaviour:



Figure 15. Lissie Brown, *Cleanliness Is Next To Godliness*, detail, 2023, ex-hibition installation. Mixed media. Photograph: Pam McKinlay.



Figure 16. Lissie Brown, *Death of a Woman*, 2023, Exhibition image, Mixed media. Photograph: Pam McKinlay.



Figure 17 & 18. Lissie Brown, *Links in the Chain of Causation*, 2023, exhibition installation. Mixed media. Photograph: Lissie Brown.

CONCLUSION

This body of work unfolded through personal and public, as well as performative and relational experiences. The narrative woven between my mother, myself and others speaks of the language of blankets that passes through generations, evoking a range of emotions dependant on personal experience. It is about human interaction and an attempt to understand the complexity of our existence and relationship with the worlds we inhabit, while acknowledging that pathways can be shot through each other and interconnected, and that both emotional and physical behaviour is societal.

On a personal note, I set out to investigate and unpick my own and my mother's experiences as a means of understanding the complexities of the mother–daughter relationship. I was able to think about the interconnections, overlays and links that existed as I stitched my own personal narrative into discussions and discourses about womanhood. This was where the decision-making in regard to the exhibition began. It has been a journey of self-discovery, providing me with a platform for the future, one where I am comfortable in my own skin, as a member of humanity, on both the 'miniature' and the 'gigantic' scales.¹² For this, I am eternally grateful.

Lissie Brown is a visual artist who currently works at Te Whare Toi O Heretaunga in Te Matua-a-Māui. Using experimental and auto ethnographic methodologies her recent research addresses inter-generational influence and the plight of the contemporary woman. Browns practice incorporates a range of media including ceramics, metal, paint, drawing materials, fabric, and recycled materials .Holding a DipFAA in Sculpture, a Dip(Ed) Art and Art History, Brown recently completed her MFA at the Dunedin School of Art.

- 1 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990; Taylor & Francis e-library, 2002 [PDF ed.]).
- 2 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
- 3 Julia Kristeva, *Motherhood Today*, <http://www.kristeva.fr/motherhood.html>. Emphasis in original.
- 4 Elizabeth Eastmond and Merimeri Penfold, *Women and the Arts in New Zealand: Forty Works, 1936-86* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1986).
- 5 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 8-10.
- 6 Petra Lamers-Schütze and Yvonne Verlag, eds., *Encyclopaedia Anatomica: A Complete Collection of Anatomical Waxes* (Cologne: Taschen, 1999).
- 7 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 10.
- 8 Kristeva, *Motherhood Today*.
- 9 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.
- 10 Michel Foucault, "Panopticism," in *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin Press, 1984), 206-13; Jia Tolentino, *Trick Mirror: Reflections on Self-Delusion* (London: 4th Estate, 2019).
- 11 Stewart, *On Longing*, 106-7.
- 12 Ibid, 77.

DOUBLE-BIND: ANITA DESOTO AND THE PLEASURES OF PAINTING

Bridie Lonie

In this article, I outline briefly Anita DeSoto's twenty-year career as a figurative painter; taking as my starting points her understanding that her interest in art stems from a fascination with the tableaux her parents' friends performed at community events; her young adulthood within the Pentecostal community, where transcendence was understood as embodied and individual; her Master of Fine Arts research into the sensuality of women's religious writings spanning the periods of the late Medieval to the Counter-Reformation; and her experience as a resident artist at the Leipzig Academy of Fine Arts, where the figuration of socialist realism had morphed into an ironic negotiation between the collective politics of socialism and the aspirations of neoliberal capitalism's focus on the self. These elements coalesce in an oeuvre centred on the roles allocated to women in the histories of the depiction of their bodies.

DeSoto was brought up in a rural neighbourhood where theatrical tableaux were a feature of Countrywomen's Institute entertainments. As a child, DeSoto saw her friends' hardworking mothers performing as if in stills from movies.¹ She remembers how their transformation through makeup, clothing and gesture gave her the sense that women's lives depended on role-play. Indeed, writers such as Lauris Edmond, who knew rural life at that period, describe the spice amateur theatricals added to the gendered routines of daily life.²

At nineteen DeSoto joined a Pentecostal Christian group, marrying and having children within that community. In her mid-thirties she turned away from both the community and its belief systems, taking her sense of life as a performance informed by passion to the rite of passage offered by the study of art. For DeSoto this entailed engagements with ideas she had previously thought not simply immoral but likely to lead to a future spent in a hell she'd believed in. Her imagery both retained the passion of her previous belief system and challenged its patriarchal nature. Her graduating works at art school were paintings on black velvet, explicitly decadent and difficult to make anything but visually satisfying. The paint is always hard and tacky, though the velvet is soft and immersive: the very style performs a contradiction between invitation and rejection, reflecting an ambivalence that she retained in her later painting.

DeSoto's postgraduate study focused on the ways that women's spiritual desire played out in the medieval thinking of Hildegard of Bingen and the baroque approaches of the Counter-Reformation. Once the political and legislative changes driven by First Wave Feminism had ensured women were not trapped by systemic barriers, the intransigent nature of ideological barriers became more apparent. DeSoto engaged with the rich theoretical field of post-structural feminist understandings of desire as a force with its own volition, and the consequent destabilization, or extension, of the notion of the self. This period, roughly dating from the 1960s to the 1990s and now characterized as second-wave or cultural feminism, encompasses both theoretical feminisms that were sometimes inaccessibly academic in nature, and performance art conveying public sexual acts as liberatory. Art's role in the production and dissemination of ideology became the subject of women's studies and courses in art schools; DeSoto's postgraduate studies were produced in this context.

DeSoto was already aware of the complexity of the notion of desire in theology. An obvious example can be found in the *Ecstasy of St Teresa* (1647-52) by Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680), a work which is able to represent physical ecstasy with impunity because of the overlap between body and soul in medieval and early Modern European Christian theology. In her 2003 Master of Fine Arts dissertation, DeSoto quoted St Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), who wrote: "And I would, Lord, for your love, be laid naked on a hurdle for for all men to wonder at me for your love – so long as it were no danger to their souls".³ The ambiguous entanglement of desire and provocation offered the kind of paradox loved by post-structuralist thinkers, the lie that reveals the truth, the statement that undermines itself as soon as uttered. DeSoto's thesis *Desire Drapes Everything* (2003) was in the form of a parallel text. She juxtaposed passages from feminist theorists such as Elspeth Probyn (1958-) and medieval scholar Caroline Walker Bynum (1941-) with her own poetry, submitting it as a small book bound in red leather as if it were designed for religious meditation. In it, DeSoto wrote:

The desire to become more than what we are provides movement, convergence and entanglement. It is ever-changing and emerging. Desire is movement; it is an energy that enables us to get, or go where we want.⁴

Throughout her work desire and its implications are interrogated.

DeSoto's paintings consistently explore the ties that both nourish and constrain. After art school, she adopted narrative, exploring the implications of her now past Christianity, the moral and affective context of her life. Increasingly, her subjects and models came from her community, a project made explicit in the title of one of her exhibitions: *A Jesus of My Own*. These works were painted in a limited palette, suffused with umber and grey, that seems to draw from the somewhat doleful painting of such artists as Guido Reni (1575-1642); but the women surrealists such as Leonora Carrington (1917-2011) can be discovered here also, in their inwardness and fantasy. In this limited palette and anatomical precision, suited to thin, abstemious bodies, she drew on the surrealists' approach to persuasion: make it plausible and it will be believed. DeSoto's work in this period seeks the uncanny valley of the virtual through anatomical and tonal precision, establishing live actors in a coloured field detached from any specific referent. In *Away, Away* (2007) a small, thoughtful boy child, a putto as in Italian painting, holds in one hand scissors and in the other the ends of a woman's plaited hair; extended as if a placental cord, while she floats above and to his left, moving in his wake.



Figure 1. Anita DeSoto, *Away, Away*, 2007, oil on canvas, 1060x1980mm.

DeSoto's capacity to portray the figure is central to her work and has developed in parallel with her career as a lecturer in life drawing and painting. Life drawing reflects changing attitudes toward the depiction of the body. During the 1970s the representation of the nude female form was understood as indicative of the subordination of women within capitalist and patriarchal systems, and life drawing classes were often the locus for the verbal and physical sexual abuse of women. Ethical protocols were developed by among others such representational and Christian artists as Allie Eagle.⁵ Art students continued to learn to represent the ways that the body's movements reflect and convey expression, and the relationship between these movements and the postures, clothes and wider contexts that surrounded them. DeSoto, in tandem with her colleague the sculptor Michele Beevors, also concerned with feminist challenges to the figurative, applied to her programme the notion of the tableaux, introducing students to pre-modernist art histories through such iconic images as Michelangelo Buonarroti's *The Last Supper* (c1495-1498), moving through lavish baroque ceiling frescos toward more targeted and historically significant works that represented power imbalances through grouped bodies, such as Théodore Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1819) and its colonial representation in Louis J. Steele and Charles Goldie's *Arrival of the Maoris in New Zealand* (1898). Students critique, mimic and mine them for the representational, symbolic and iconographical messages they convey, and recognize that the naked human body cannot be regarded abstracted from its context: it is always inflected by its siting in race and gender.

With the decline in the genres of both religious and historical painting in the late nineteenth century, representational and figurative art had been left largely to the portrait, the nude, the still life and the landscape; genres where symbolism was actively discouraged, either because of a modernist concern with formal language or a disdain for narrative as kitsch. However, in the period following World War I, the newly formed states whose political constitutions sought a re-enchantment of domestic and political life in different forms of socialism, adopted representational painting with a zeal similar to that of the sixteenth-century Counter-Reformation period that had turned the Christian narrative into theatre. Utopian visions of family and rural life, or of engagements in the rebuilding of damaged infrastructure and economy through industrialization, flourished in the Soviet countries in particular, where art schools continued to deliver skills-based learning through the vehicle of the human form in settings exemplary of approaches to the proper way to live, but informed now by explicit political rather than religious ideology. By the 1990s, after the dissolution of the Soviet state, both history and figurative painting were studied almost exclusively only in those countries that were dealing with the legacies of socialist realism.

It was for this reason that in 2010 DeSoto gained a residency at the Leipzig International Art Programme, where the artists Neo Rauch and, particularly relevant for DeSoto, Rosa Loy practiced; Rosa Loy's studio was close to DeSoto's. In the demise of the socialist states, the strictly articulated subject matter of socialist realism had become revealed as ideological fantasy, both demoralizing and de-stabilizing, just as had the religious realism of the remaining strands of the Counter-Reformation (indicated in the Vatican's current insistence that it is not an art gallery but an educational museum). The Leipzig artists deconstructed the rhetorical gesture, in a mood both melancholy and satirical, both consistent with spatial realism and challenging of it, while still requiring the disciplines of representational realism.⁶ This mood was suited to DeSoto's enduring concern with role-play's capacity to express beliefs and experiences. She returned from Leipzig with a new interest in colour and a desire to engage with metaphors broader than those of Christianity and the family, though retaining the understanding that if something was valuable its wellspring could be found in everyday life. She held the exhibition *Come Back* (2012) at Milford Galleries Dunedin. In these works we can see perhaps the community she remembered from her childhood, of women enacting neighbourly rituals with teacups and conversations. Both men and women develop tree-like limbs, as in Ovid's account of Daphne becoming a tree to avoid pursuit, and they are enclosed in glass-like bubbles that prevent communication. DeSoto's colours are bright, sharply contrasting, the style still intensely descriptive. Both the smooth surfaces and the references to bubbles suggest that this is a defensive femininity, impenetrable yet challenging.



Figure 2. Anita DeSoto, *Other Worldly*, 2011, oil on canvas, 1830x1370mm.

Then, DeSoto's work changed dramatically. She turned to the historical photograph. While her work drew on that of the Leipzig realists, she had not yet engaged with their gestural qualities. Dissatisfied with the constraints of her approach to brushwork, modelling and chiaroscuro, which located the affect of the work in its verisimilitude rather than its painterly qualities, she adopted the approach of another ex-socialist-realist, Gerhard Richter (b.1932). Richter's painterly erasures of the photograph shifted his source material from the empirical document to the sensual subjectivity implied by the gestural mark, getting rid of, at the same time, the photograph's capacity to act as objective evidence. The figures in DeSoto's exhibition *Our Frocks like Mountains* (2018) are first painted and then almost erased by parallel strokes and smears of plain colour, sometimes referencing the dresses worn by the original subjects, as if their costumes or performances had taken control.

DeSoto's next step was to develop a significantly more painterly style by appropriating the pagan pleasures that the Counter-Reformation strategy had cunningly allowed itself. The late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century artists she mimicked moved happily between the radically sensual scenes of the classical writers and the sumptuous depictions of the Christian narrative, as though no contradiction existed between them. Counter-Reformation artists such as Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) and Jacob Joseph Jordaens (1593|678) were commissioned by the Roman Catholic church to make works that challenged the iconoclasm of the Lutheran Reformation, which saw the depiction of the Christian narrative as distracting and the theatrical as sinful. In Southern Europe and Flanders, the Church saw the representation of the Christian narrative in terms of sensual experience as a powerful way to re-engage with its community; thereby also retaining the depiction of lavish and sensual environments. These extraordinarily skilled graphic artists conveyed movement and form through gesture, drapery and full tonal and chromatic registers. Yet for women, the period of the Counter-Reformation saw the most excessive misogyny of the Christian era.

The *Malleus Maleficarium* (*Hammer of Witches*) (1486), advocating the burning of witches, though not accepted by the Inquisition, was revived during the time that the Counter-Reformation artists flourished.⁷ DeSoto read Sylvia Federici's Marxist argument that this appalling rise in misogyny stemmed from the delegation of the literal production of the labour force through procreation to women, who should have no autonomy.⁸ Federici connects the enclosures of the commons with the witchhunts, pointing out that the women identified as witches were able to live outside the system of the procreative labour force of capitalism: their accusers were the land-owning people whose authority this independence challenged.⁹

The perilous double-bind women had to negotiate was evident in their symbolic representation in art as both seducer and trophy, the producer of sensual pleasure, the prize of the victorious god, or the paragon of moral restraint represented by sainthood. Their bodies, in art, were plainly understood as the source of sexual pleasure, but this pleasure was not one they could own themselves. The question posed by second-wave feminism is significant here. Freudian theories of the gaze suggest that distance and the impossibility of reaching conclusion provide erotic pleasure, while notions of abjection suggest that pleasure lies in the dissolution of the self in an entropic cascade into nothingness, often represented in art by excess in pigment and the blurring or dissolving of form, as in abstract expressionism. Hilary Radner has pointed out that "DeSoto's brushwork recalls the masculinist energy of mid-twentieth century abstract expressionism, another stylistic appropriation".¹⁰ Absent the male/female dialectic, where is women's pleasure? Intersectional feminism has moved this question to a focus on identity, but painting keeps returning to another but related intersection, the visual and the sensual as located on the flat but deceptively haptic field of the canvas, a location that both continues to generate and reference sexual desire.



Figure 3. Anita DeSoto, *The Grass Was Golden*, 2017, oil on signboard, 1000x750mm.

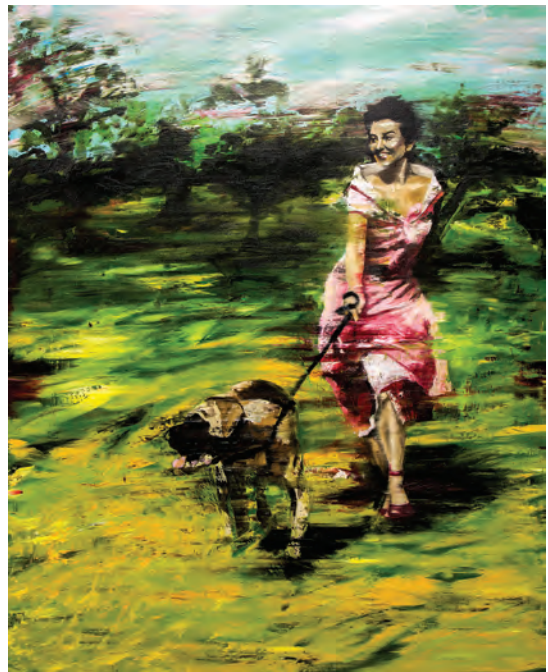


Figure 4. Anita DeSoto, *Violet at the End of the Day*, 2018, oil on signboard, 1200x1200mm.



Figure 5. Anita DeSoto, *Her Fertility Turned Him into a Tree, after Jordaen*, 2023, oil on canvas, 1980x1675mm.

In her most recent exhibitions DeSoto seeks to answer this double-bind by reclaiming pictorial pleasure as the possession of its subjects, the women depicted, along with all the accompanying allegorical flourishes of flower and fruit. In *I don't want your Golden Apple* (2022) she explores the allegorization by male painters of women as prizes. The strength of the genre is reinforced by the addition of the artist Rosalba Carriera (1673-1757), who, along with others of her time, offered themselves or other women as objects of pleasure. DeSoto heightens the colour afforded to the female protagonists and dims that of the males to indicate the gendered dialogues within the works by tonal difference. At the same time, the flourishing of colour dissolves the clarity of the forms, replacing the body's representation with the full affect of gestural abstraction. In recent re-workings of two allegories by Jaques Jordaens, she has increased that difference. Jordaens, like the other painters of this period, doubled morality tales with a delight in sensual excess.¹¹ In *Allegory of Fruitfulness* (2022) and *Her Fertility Turned Him into a Tree, after Jordaen* (2022), the dissolution of form and body by only a small extension of painterliness results in a sensual array that almost spills into the formlessness of abjection, with here a toe, a hand, a limb emerging from the swirling colours. Yet, also clearly visible, we see a menstrual red running down the women's legs. As in the previous exhibition, the male figures are diminished into greys and browns, the mud colours of the underpainting of the period. While the male protagonists lose the dramatic force and agency they held in the original works, this tactic allocates to them women's role in the original dyad of abjection: they become the substrate that holds things together. The ever paradoxical nature of the dialectic generated by the division of labour through sexual dimorphism is inverted, but remains, a constant difficulty.

DeSoto's trajectory as an artist has entwined two major concerns: the roles played by women as assigned to them by gender, as wife, mother, object of male desire; and the role of figurative painting itself in this situation. The idea of the tableaux she identified early as a focal point, has retained its significance for her in its capacity as exemplar, allegory or test case. Her approach to painting has moved from austerity to abundance, but continues to deliver the problematic she began with. Representational drawing remains central to her practice, reinforcing through moments of figurative accuracy her negotiation with raw paint as the conveyer of affect.

Bridie Lonie, Emeritus Member, Otago Polytechnic|Te Pūkenga was a founding member of the Wellington Women's Gallery in 1980. She has a BFA in painting. Her MA in art history was entitled "Word and image in the production of meaning in art therapy" (1998). Her PhD "Closer Relations: art, climate change, interdisciplinarity and the Anthropocene (2018)" led to the curation of the exhibitions *The Complete Entanglement of everything* (2020) with Pam McKinlay and *Kapital* (2022) with Adrian Hall at the Dunedin School of Art.

Anita DeSoto is a Dunedin artist with 25 years of experience exhibiting her paintings nationally and internationally. She holds a Master of Fine Arts and has been teaching Drawing and Painting at the Dunedin School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, since 2004. Anita has also been awarded several arts residencies, including one at the Leipzig International Art Program in Germany (2010), at the New Pacific Studios in Vallejo, San Francisco in 2014 and the Aratoi Fellow in Masterton in 2018.

- 1 Anita DeSoto, unpublished interviews with Bridie Lonie, April 2023.
- 2 Lauris Edmond's memoirs and the novels of Mary Scott convey the importance of theatrical performances in rural environments in the 1950s and early 1960s. Lauris Edmond, *An Autobiography* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books 2001).
- 3 Quoted in Anita DeSoto, "Desire drapes everything", unpublished thesis, Dunedin School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, 2003, 70
- 4 Ibid, 30.
- 5 Sandra Chesterman, *Figure Work: The Nude and Life Modelling in New Zealand Art* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2002).
- 6 Boris Groys, "Haunted by Communism", in *Contemporary Art in Eastern Europe*, ed. Pheobe Adler and Duncan McQuorquindale, (London: Black Dog Publishing 2010), 18-25.
- 7 Heinrich Institoris and Jacob Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, edited by Christopher S. McKay (Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, first published in 1486).
- 8 Sylvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004/2014).
- 9 Ibid, 171.
- 10 Hilary Radner, catalogue essay, in *I Don't want your golden apple – Anita DeSoto* (Dunedin: Otago Polytechnic Press, 2022), unpaginated.
- 11 Hans Vlieghe, "Flemish and Dutch painting in the seventeenth century: Changing views of a diptych", in A.W.F.M. Meij, with Maartje de Haan, *Van Dyck, Rubens, Jordaens and their circle: Flemish Master Drawings from the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2002). 23-30.

THE QUILT PROJECT (2021-22)

Arati Kushwaha

INTRODUCTION

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights, regardless of their gender. No country in the world has gender equality. It varies from one place to another, yet the same issue exists at a universal level. I believe it is necessary that artistic projects articulate the disgrace behind this social issue. Women are facing gender parity problems at workplaces and in the art world and continue to be under-represented in parliament. In New Zealand, women generally have higher rates of participation in all categories of unpaid work, both within and outside of the household.¹ Among part-time workers, three quarters are women. Across the economy, women's skills are under-used in leadership and women continue to earn less than men, even if they have the same qualifications and similar job descriptions.² The Quilt Project is an intervention about gender inequality and discrimination in society.

I initiated the Quilt Project in collaboration with Dunedin's Stitch Kitchen and the Otago Pioneer Women's Memorial Association Inc. Two queen-sized quilts were sewn over several months. The project was a creative community initiative where the public were invited to take part in monthly workshops and explore issues of gender equality through the making and piecing together of two community quilts. The large-scale quilts featured appliqué of basic mathematical symbols, such as the not equal sign, the inequality sign, greater than, less than, and the power sign. This report positions the project as a feminist form of resistance to gender discrimination and outlines how traditional quilting sustains engagement with issues faced by women and gender-diverse people around the world.



THE PROCESS

Two pilot workshops involving around 100 participants were held at the University of Otago and at Stitch Kitchen in March 2021. The first of these was on International Women's Day, 8 March, when the Ōtepoti Collective Against Sexual Abuse (ŌCASA) collaborated with Stitch Kitchen, Te Whare Tāwharau and myself to run an event where students, staff and migrants could come together to create a quilt which explored themes of gender discrimination, oppression and inequality through the medium of textiles.

A second event was held at Stitch Kitchen Studio as part of the Dunedin Fringe Festival. Many participants had never had the opportunity to use a sewing machine before or been involved in a creative project that linked their personal views on an issue with a visual arts outlet. This raised understanding of how art and crafts can be used for communication. As the project took place in public spaces, it included people of a wide range of ages, and often intergenerational participants, with grandparents and parents involved. Learning and experiencing crafts together was a valuable experience, enhancing community creativity and wellbeing.



During the process of creating quilt panels, workshop attendees had impromptu discussions about the gender inequality in their lives and connections with quilting. Their views varied widely. Six semi-structured interviews were also conducted with participants. Ideas and experiences of quilting, women's identities, gender inequality and personal wellbeing were explored with participants. We discerned a series of benefits arising from the project: an enhanced awareness of gender equality as vital in society; relationships between gender; quilting and sewing; quilts as a metaphor for unity in diversity; and women working creatively together to support a social issue. The project empowered women and created an opportunity to work together; through needlework, to build a non-patriarchal group.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, many of our original scheduled workshops and locations had to be rescheduled or cancelled, leading to extra administration, confusion and difficulty in marketing the workshops. Nonetheless, the main goals of the project were realised, with partnerships being important to its success. Partnering with local organisations with similar gender equality goals enabled access to more resources and reached a wide range of participants. These partnerships included access to networks, technology, distribution outlets, materials and information. Workshops were hosted at various alternative venues including Toitū Otago Settlers Museum, The Valley Project, ŌCASA and the Otago Pioneer Women's Memorial Hall. The project had a sustainable focus with the use of upcycled materials from Stitch Kitchen Pantry; 4.63 kg of materials were diverted from landfill as one of the outcomes of the project.

CONCLUSION

The Quilt Project culminated in an exhibition held at the Dunedin Community Gallery, which also included quilting demonstrations and talks. The project incorporated best practice in community arts for communication and collaborative processes. With the timing of the project and disruption caused by COVID-19, issues of feminism and gender equality seemed to be low on people's priorities. We failed to attract people to participate in the project whose voices represented the full range of issues and experiences that we originally intended the project to showcase. However, reactions of participants were positive, with excellent learning experiences and creative outcomes achieved, including practical skills, problem solving, mindfulness in remaining focused on the task and social benefits of talking and sharing the experience with immediate family and the wider community.

Acknowledgements

The Quilt Project was made possible through funding and support from a Dunedin City Council Arts Grant, the Community Organisation Grants Scheme (COGS), the Otago Pioneer Women's Memorial Association Inc and the venue provided by Stitch Kitchen. Equipment and assistance were also shared by Stitch Kitchen (Just Atelier Trust).

Born in India in 1982, **Arati Kushwaha** (ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8021-8955>) is a visual artist who completed a Master of Visual Arts at the Dunedin School of Art in 2018. Arati has had international group and solo exhibitions, attended numerous international residences, and directed community projects.

1 Melanie Nolan, "Employment Organisations," *NZ History*, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/women-together/theme/employment-organisations> 2018.

2 Ibid.

SPECTRAL SEAS. ARTS AND THE ANTHROPOCENE: BRIDGING THE CLASSROOM AND THE REAL WORLD TO ADDRESS SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL CRISES

Raquel Salvatella de Prada and Jonathan Henderson

INTRODUCTION

Spectral Seas is a collaborative installation that depicts the scale of future sea-level rise in North Carolina waters in the United States. The project was part of two semester-long courses at Duke University in North Carolina, USA, where a team addressed social and ecological crises, engaging in scientific research and art-making under the theme "Arts and the Anthropocene: Crisis and Resilience in North Carolina Waterways."¹

The project followed a model that offers an immersive research experience to graduate and undergraduate students, encouraging teams to collaborate in interdisciplinary research with faculty and professionals from different disciplines. These projects bring together a diverse group of academics and students to shed light on a topic of choice in a multi-disciplined collaboration. Our multidisciplinary team spent the academic year meeting with local scientists, artists and environmental activists researching climate change, the Anthropocene, community resiliency and environmental justice. We created arts-based interventions that illuminated and reimagined crises we face in North Carolina regarding water contamination, sea-level rise, increased inland flooding and storm events, all exacerbated by climate change.

For the project to be fulfilling for all participants, it was important to find a topic that interested all of us and that also allowed us to create a course structure that enhanced interaction across the different fields and people involved.

This report shares an overview of our research, the student-led art proposals we developed and the multimodal art installation and StoryMap collection we worked on. It also explores our intention of making a truly collaborative project, the horizontal and vertical integration across disciplines and some of the challenges we encountered along the way.

METHODS

Along the interconnected webs of waterways, coastlines and barrier islands, communities in North Carolina are wrestling with how to plan for and respond to the shifts in our surrounding environment and the corresponding impacts of storm surge, sea-level rise, flooding and contamination. Achieving sustainability and guaranteeing human dignity in the Anthropocene requires collaborative action, diverse expertise and different modes of storytelling. We contributed to this effort by exploring how the arts can mobilise the imagination and moral intelligence of human communities in an era that requires us to reimagine the relationship between humans and the natural environment.

The Arts and the Anthropocene programme explored how visual, theatrical and sonic arts can play a role in educating various publics, provoking action and prefiguring resilient futures in the era of the Anthropocene. Our goal was to figure out how these multiple modes of inquiry might reflect, refract, reference, reinforce or reframe one another:

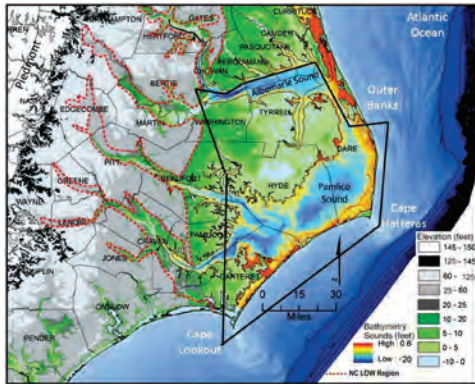


Figure 1. LiDAR (colour topography) map of North Carolina's Land of Water. The black outline area represents North Carolina's vast 'night sky' resource. Created by Stan Riggs and Dorothea Ames.



Figure 2. Photograph by Will Warasila from his first monograph *Quicker than Coal Ash*, published in November 2022 by Gnostic Book.

We started this year-long project in the fall semester of 2020 by examining how scientists and artists have sought to address social and ecological crises and entanglements. We had guest speakers who visited our class for discussions on their research, activism and their art-making. In addition, by reading environmental fiction and nonfiction, we learned about the challenges facing North Carolina waterways and their subsequent impacts on local communities. We covered a variety of issues, from the connection of water and agriculture to the impact of sea-level rise on coastal communities. We cycled through a process of research, creation and reflection, all of which, in turn, demanded new questions. Along the way, we aimed to foster a pedagogical space where the whole team would engage in an inductive collaborative process.

Our guest speakers ranged from environmental and deep-sea scientists to activists, lawyers, playwrights, photojournalists and filmmakers. From river keepers to composers of river sounds, each of our guests taught us new ways of perceiving similar issues related to water; and shared creative tools and ideas for communicating our current environmental crises through art. Throughout, we focused on the role human activity has played in creating these crises, and the role it can play in finding solutions.

Students responded to our research sessions with creative weekly reflections, including prose, poetry, visual art and sound recordings. For instance, one student, Kendal Jefferys, responded to one of the sessions with a painting and a poem.



Figure 3. Kendrick Ransome and Marquetta Dickens in 2019 in the Tar River at Shiloh Landing, where enslaved Africans were brought ashore to be sold to plantations in Edgecombe County. Dickens and Ransome co-founded Freedom Org; Ransome runs Golden Organic Farm in nearby Pinetops, NC, and has family connections to Princeville. Photograph: Justin Cook.

How do we paint in the dark?

How do we paint in the dark?

Monet painted light
watching water lilies
from the same place
light creates new
spaces, stand still
and the world around you
moves

1,000 feet deep
the sunlight dies,
eaten by the sea

How do we paint life
that does not know
our colors?

How do we paint
in the dark?



Figure 4. Art reflection by Kendall Jefferys.

Towards the end of the fall semester, small teams of students turned their inspiration into art proposals. The proposed pieces had the goal of engaging their audiences and provoking them to think deeply about North Carolina waterways and the issues facing the human communities that rely on them for their livelihoods and daily activities.

The following art proposals resulted from this process:

- “In Too Deep” played with photographs by overlaying them with patterns and sculpture to reflect the personal stories of those impacted by rising seas and inland flooding events.
- “The Kitchen” explored the question of what happens to a once-pristine home when overuse of water comes back to haunt its inhabitants. The proposal envisioned an immersive installation with surround-sound speakers, flopping fish and strands of seaweed strewn everywhere.
- “Reimagining Flow” reflected on how to encourage better water use through painting murals, finding community values and exploring innovative ways of gardening in urban spaces via a public installation in Durham downtown, inviting community members to join.
- “Drink Clean” looked at 3D images and video projected over water to present the issue of contaminated drinking water in an exciting, unexpected and engaging format.
- “Spectral Seas” reflected on sea-level rise in North Carolina coastal communities by creating woven sculptures of colourful waves from recycled materials such as plastic bags.

After considering everyone’s proposals, the group decided to focus on sea-level rise on North Carolina’s coast. We used a colourful graph in the woven wave idea presented by the “Spectral Seas” proposal as the starting point for our work on this installation, but combined it with some ideas from the “Drink Clean” proposal, such as video projection and a focus on contaminated water concerns.

During the second semester, in the spring of 2021, the team started working on the *Spectral Seas* installation, communicating the impacts of sea-level rise on the North Carolina coast. All members of the team undertook further research about sea-level rise while at the same time designing and creating the installation.

INSTALLATION

Spectral Seas is a collaborative installation that depicts the scale of future sea-level rise in North Carolina waters. In this location on the East Coast of the United States, sea levels are already up to 11 inches (28 cm) higher than they were in 1950.¹

The Tapestry: To assess the impact of sea-level rise on local communities, we researched environmental artists who are responding to the topic of sea-level rise in their own work, as well as artists who utilise recycled materials, trash from the ocean, plastic bottles, aluminum cans and found objects. At some point, our visual research began to focus on water-like and wave-like structures to show the pollution of the ocean and sea-level rise. These ideas formed the basis for the realisation of our project.

While researching sea-level rise, some students came across two graphs that show different scenarios, displaying the specific number of feet from moderate to severe sea-level rise. These graphs were instrumental in developing the design of our project. Each student group created different mockup designs to visualise what the project would look like. This gave them another chance to generate individual design ideas. Subsequently, we went through many discussions and iterations, debated different methods and weighed the pros and cons of the different designs until we came up with the final design, a 6 x 7 feet (1.8 x 2 m) tapestry woven from over 400 plastic bags that were collected from the Durham community and processed into plastic yarn (plarn). The plastic bags were a way of repurposing single-use plastics and emphasising that plastic pollution is contaminating our waterways at a disturbingly fast pace, harming wildlife and human health.

Most of the bags were sourced from supermarkets such as Food Lion, and provided a great base, given that they were white and had a little bit of blue on them. Other bags were sourced from friends, recycle programmes and trash containers. We also used dark grey plastic bags from Walmart and light green bags found at the vegetable section in supermarkets. Colour played a large role throughout our planning and the creation of the weaving. The colour palette represents the NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) sea-level rise prediction for 2100, with scenarios of severity from moderate to severe. The grey area represents the lowest prediction, 7 inches (18 cm) of additional sea-level rise, which would require an immediate reduction in global greenhouse gas emissions. The light green section represents over 6 feet (1.8 m) of sea level rise, the highest prediction. Some bags were dyed to achieve the colour palette we needed. Pompoms at the top of the tapestry represent a cresting wave breaking over the population and the land.

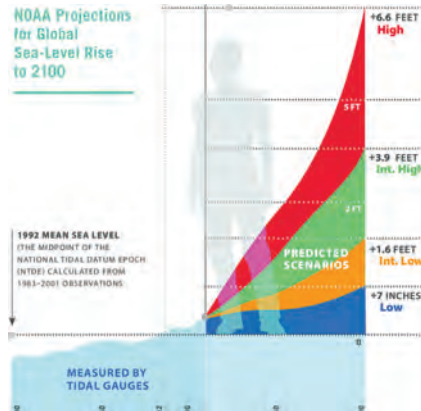


Figure 5. NOAA projections for global sea-level rise to 2100. Inspirational graph from the group *Spectral Seas*.

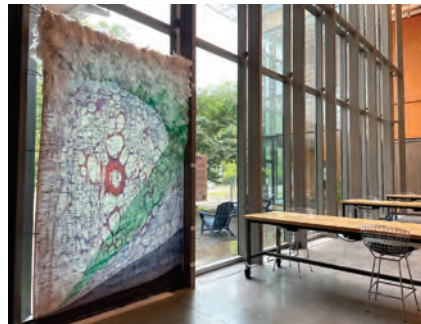


Figure 6. Tapestry installed at the Rubenstein Arts Center, North Carolina.

Projection Mapping: We investigated the use of projection to help tell a deeper story and complement the weaving, adding movement to the texture of the tapestry. We thought about how thematically we could portray the impact of sea-level rise on humans, wildlife, urban environments and forestry.

For our collaboration, the main challenges were, first, to make sure each person's individual style came through in the video, and second, to link the resulting individual sections with seamless transitions to make the video cohesive. The team thought extensively about colours, textures and transitions that evoked emotions and their experiences with nature, in order to create a compelling narrative and immersive imagery for the viewer. We used warm colours in contrast to the cool colours of the tapestry.

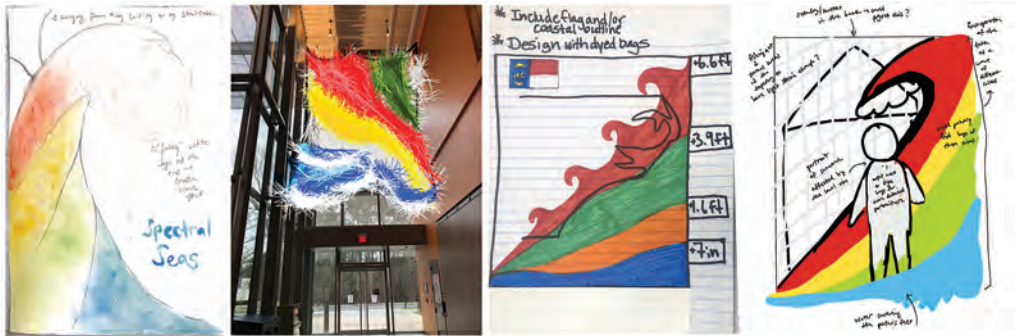


Figure 7. A selection of sketches created by different members of the team.



Figure 8, 9 & 10. Weaving iterations and design mockups. Photographs: Raquel Salvatella.

Figure 11. Weaving team showing examples to the audio and video team via Zoom due to COVID restrictions.

The **video**² starts with wildlife scenes, depicting animals which live on the Outer Banks of North Carolina and which are impacted by sea-level rise. It then moves to imagery of grasses and life-sustaining mechanisms in forests along the shoreline, towards waves where it gradually zooms out. The water ultimately becomes a hazard, through flooding, water contamination and mould, as the images transition to a more urban environment portraying the consequences of water rising. By incorporating images and movement, the video projections add another textural layer to the installation. Lapping waves, shadows of human figures and photography from the Outer Banks aim to portray the impact of sea-level rise on humans and the environment. We hope that the video allows the audience to understand the immediate problem while thinking about future possibilities to mitigate the impact of sea-level rise.

The **soundtrack** for the installation is composed of field recordings made above and below the water surface along the North Carolina coast. We were able to use recordings from PhD candidate Will Cioffi who does research at the Duke Marine Lab, and a couple of team members were able to record sounds of the rising tide flowing into a saltmarsh. They captured the sounds of waves breaking onto sand, as well as birds and insects singing in the distance. Hydrophone recordings of humpback whales and dolphins and various fish species became a key component of the mix. The goal of the audio was to evoke the beauty of underwater sea life, the quiet tide of the saltmarsh, the restlessness of crashing waves and the impending threat that sea-level rise poses to ecosystems.

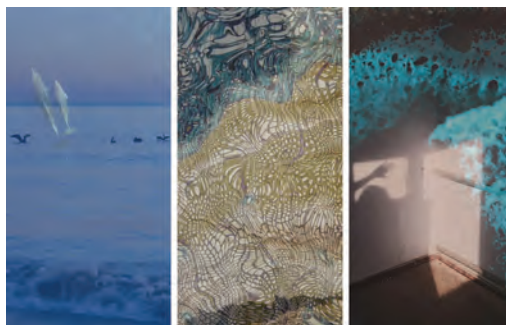


Figure 12. Selected frames from the video animation.



Figure 13. Selected frames from the video animation.



Figures 14 & 15. Students working with sound.

The exhibit: The exhibit opened on Earth Day, 22 April 2021, at the Rubenstein Arts Center in Durham, North Carolina. Since it was indoors, and unfortunately, due to COVID, it was only open to viewers from the Duke community. One of the goals of this installation was to support activism through our art piece by creating an atmospheric, emotional connection between the viewer and the seashore, and by sharing stories and warnings about what is happening regarding climate change and sea-level rise on the coast of North Carolina. Since we aimed to engage a broader audience, we also created a virtual opening, to which we invited all the guest speakers who participated in our class during the academic year, as well as anyone from the Duke community and beyond who wished to join. We shared our research, experience, StoryMaps¹ and a five-minute video piece that portrayed the installation for those who could not physically see it. The virtual opening provided an opportunity to showcase the work, not only at the local level but also internationally, reaching viewers from various locations across the United States and around the world.

MAKING STORYMAPS:

In order to share our project in both a narrative and visual way, the team used ArcGIS StoryMaps, a digital web-based application that can easily combine text, interactive maps and other multimedia content.

We set up different teams to develop the StoryMaps. Each team focused on a specific topic (“The Science of Sea Level Rise,” “Local Impact”) and our learning process throughout the year, as part of “Bass Connections,” the “Art Installation” and “Our Team.” One of the goals for the StoryMaps was to deliver more content to audiences than the final art installation could achieve. We wanted to capture all the research and work behind creating the exhibition, and make it available online.

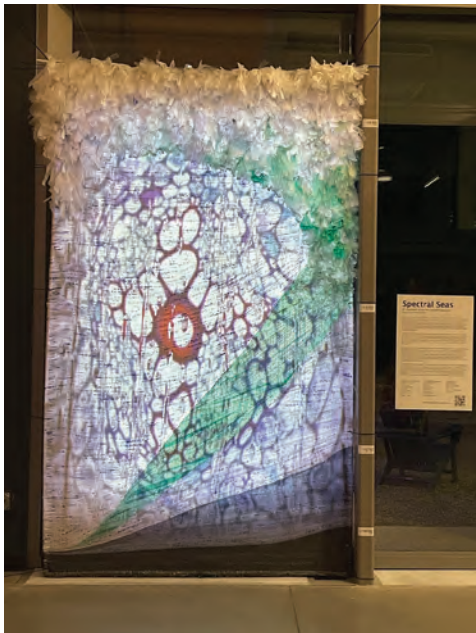


Figure 16. Art installation.
Photograph: Raquel Salvatella.



Figure 17. Flyer to advertise the virtual event and installation.

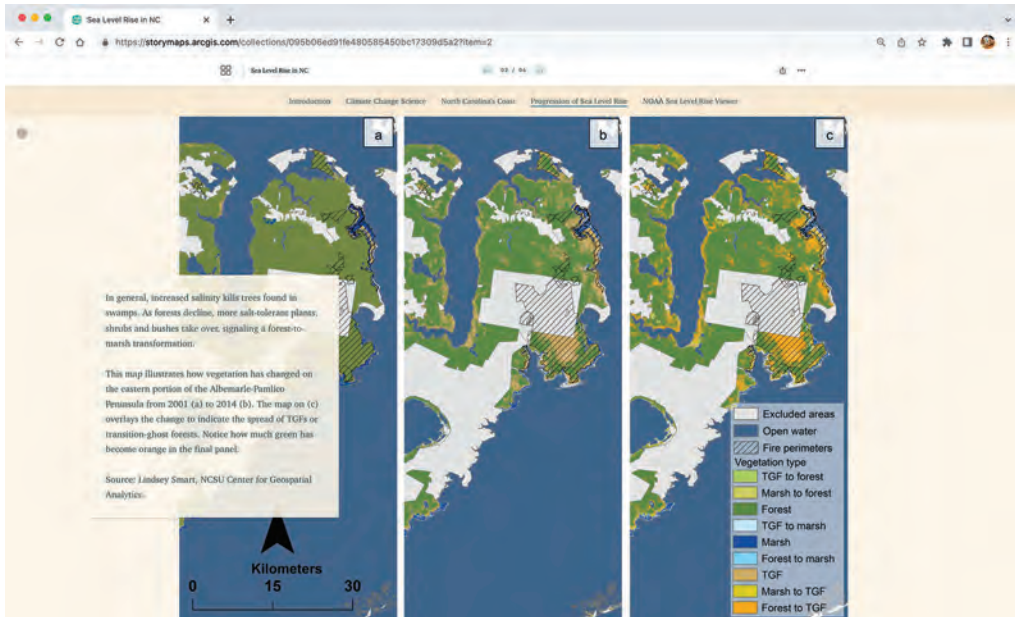


Figure 18. Partial screenshot from the section "Effects of Sea Level Rise" within the StoryMaps.
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/095b06ed91fe480585450bc17309d5a2?item=2>

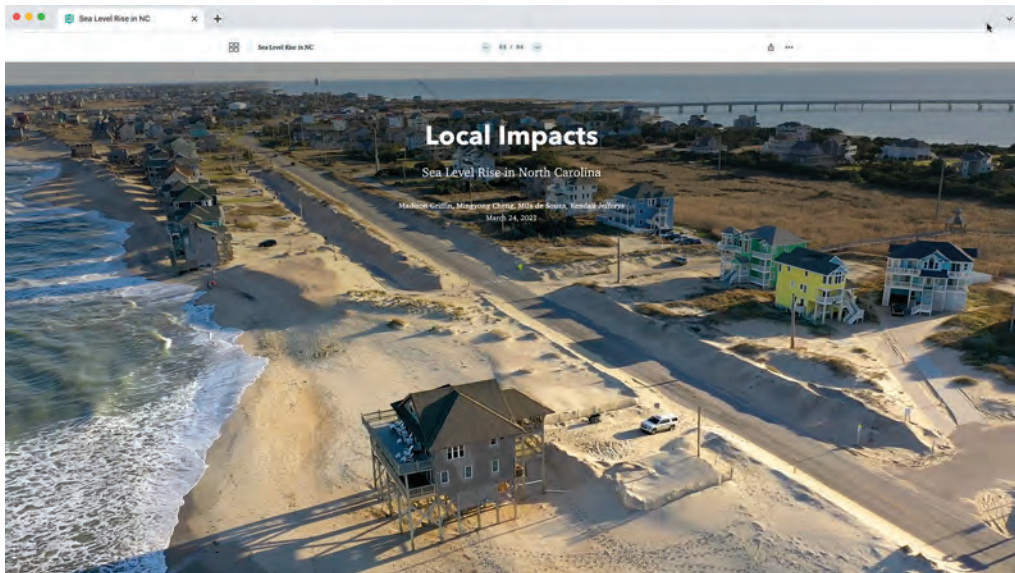


Figure 19. Partial screenshot from the section "Local Impacts" within the StoryMaps.
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/095b06ed91fe480585450bc17309d5a2?item=3>
 Image from a video frame by Justin Cook.

The Science of Sea Level Rise presents a scientific perspective on what sea-level rise means, why it matters for human beings and what effects it has on the North Carolina coast, not only on humans but also on the natural ecosystems. Students researched the tensions between short-term and long-term solutions by looking into resilient structural and non-structural coastal solutions, policy and planning, both from an engineering and design perspective and from a planning and policy perspective.

Local Impact describes how sea-level rise affects our local communities. Interactivity allows zooming into a specific location to explore different local stories.

Bass Connections describes what we learned throughout the academic year and how it helped us better understand the connections between science and art. It includes our research process in a class environment, a selection of reflections on the guests' visits, summaries of the books we read and the art proposals students created.

Our Team shows the various contributors to the project. This was a team of students with diverse backgrounds and expertise. We were able to have a fully interdisciplinary collaboration.

Spectral Seas installation goes into more detail about the creation of the installation which I described above.



Figure 20. Arts and the Anthropocene Bass Connections team.

CHALLENGES

Arts and the Anthropocene was an ambitious teaching project which tried to achieve integration across disciplines and amidst the pandemic. Horizontal integration involved many experts from different fields, while vertical integration involved undergraduates, MFA, PhD students, faculty and professionals, all in one team.

We had undergraduate students whose majors included international comparative studies, environmental sciences (marine biology, marine science and conservation), environmental engineering, environmental science and policy, English, cultural anthropology, intersectional sustainability and fashion, visual & media studies and visual arts. We had graduate students in environmental management, marine science and conservation, art history, experimental and documentary arts and ethnomusicology; faculty members from the School of Environment, Art, Art History & Visual Studies; and members of the local community who are photojournalists and artists.

Some of the challenges we had to address were:

- How to communicate one of the challenges of North Carolina waterways (sea-level rise) to an audience
- How to address a real problem that was close to our hearts through art
- How to achieve this by integrating different disciplines and levels of expertise
- How to deal with the restrictions at the beginning of a pandemic when we were not sure what would happen even days into the future, for instance, with regard to field trips to collect data and video and sound recordings
- How to encourage students to collaborate when they are often unwilling or not used to it

What made our team and project unique was that we managed to give every member of the group intellectual ownership of the final project. Each and every one contributed and could identify with the installation. An important step was the discussion that led to the selection of our project. When we formed the team, we did not yet know what we could produce. In addition, the project allowed us to create a course structure that enhanced interaction across the different fields, and between people and their expertise, so that everyone could contribute and not feel like they were just helpers. Collaborations can sometimes mean that students do the footwork and don't contribute intellectually, or that faculty advise and mentor students on creating a student project. In contrast, I think we managed to create an interdisciplinary and collective project integrating everyone, without much hierarchy.

When preparing for this class, the original plan was to gather materials by making two research field trips in North Carolina, but we were not able to do that due to COVID. At the same time, we were able to redirect our funds to bring more speakers than initially planned to the classroom via Zoom. This change enriched our experience throughout the fall semester, even though we spent it entirely in remote learning mode. Having to do everything online was a significant challenge, especially trying to build relationships to work on a collaborative project. The class met once a week for two hours and thirty minutes, and that amount of time over Zoom was exhausting for the students, even with breaks.

The spring semester also started over Zoom, still remote, working on design mock-ups and brainstorming the installation. Not having seen everybody face-to-face made the second semester more exciting when the time came to finally do so. When we could meet physically, we worked in small groups initially, and bigger groups when restrictions eased slightly. We also tried to meet outside as much as possible. COVID was a challenge throughout the collaborative process, but it also provided unique opportunities. For example, since artist residencies were not running, we were able to reserve a painting studio space just for this class, so we could leave work in progress on location and have students come to weave whenever they could. Creating a scheduling structure where students could sign in in small groups to work on the tapestry and create plastic yarn was crucial, since only one person at a time (sometimes two) could be weaving the tapestry.

Eventually, time became essential. We had to ensure that we were getting everything done in time for the installation to open on the arranged day. Fortunately, everyone felt responsible for our ultimate success and worked hard in the final weeks to complete the art project and StoryMaps.



Figure 21. Students Sarah Kelso (left) and Kate Kelly (right) weaving.



Figure 22. Students Alison Rosebaum (left) and Kate Kelly (right) creating plarn (plastic yarn).

Having all these different components in the project made efficient organisation a central concern. We used a tool called RACI Matrix, which is a diagram or chart that shows the list of project tasks and the persons who are Responsible, Accountable, Consulted or Informed for each task.

When designing the installation, we initially hoped to create it as an outdoor exhibit so that COVID restrictions would not be too difficult to apply. Still, multiple factors such as weather conditions (strong winds and rainstorms), wildlife possibly getting entangled in the mesh, inexperience with outdoor sculpture and space availability pushed us to move the installation indoors. The artwork evolved correspondingly to accommodate the space available and the skills of the team.

Even though we mitigated the impact of COVID restrictions, the engagement of the local community was still limited compared to what would have been possible if they had had the opportunity to visit the installation and engage more intimately with the topic of sea-level rise at a local level. Local issues and possible solutions are not as commonly understood as one might think. We could have also involved the viewers by organising a workshop that explored rethinking plastic contamination and the use of plastic in our everyday lives through the creation of woven items using plastic yarn.

The project was a genuinely collective effort, and the group experience, though more limited than it would have usually been, was perhaps more valuable to all of us at a time when social isolation was the norm.



Figure 23. Arts and the Anthropocene Bass Connections team.



Figures 24-25. Tapestry details. Photograph: Robert Zimmerman.



Figure 26-27. Tapestry closeups. Photograph by Raquel Salvatella.

CONCLUSION

Arts and the Anthropocene saw scholarship blossom into art and lead to activism. There is something special about this kind of interdisciplinary collaboration, where one can be surprised by how people's ideas run into each other and spark ways of thinking about something that one may not have imagined.

We took advantage of being remote by hearing so many speakers from all over the country who did not have to travel to Durham to speak with us. We were able to produce our multidisciplinary project, even during the pandemic, thanks to the flexibility of the university facilities, but also because we are surrounded by colleagues, students of all levels and experts who are motivated, love what they do and were able to contribute to this project. We all learned things that we would never have learned otherwise. We did not just explore other people's art, but we created something beautiful of our own.

We were fortunate that students were willing to engage in this very open process. Of course, a team project compels all participants to move forward together, and this means that some students feel rushed while others could work even faster. This led to ups and downs in motivation for some. As a result, students did not contribute equal amounts of effort or output to the many time-consuming tasks that had to be performed, and understanding and accepting this is a useful lesson about teamwork. In the end, the important thing was that everyone – students, faculty and outside collaborators – was able to contribute, not just their skills and time, but also their interests and views.

Raquel Salvatella de Prada is an artist and educator who focuses on integrating computer animation and motion design with different traditional art forms by collaborating with artists of diverse backgrounds. She finds that the combination of her digital medium with physical visual media can be a powerful way to communicate social issues. Her work and her collaborative performance pieces have been featured at festivals and on stages across the country and internationally.

Jonathan Henderson is a multi-instrumentalist active as a musician, producer, writer, and educator. He has produced recordings in the US and Senegal, created music and sound art for film, theater, and art installations, and regularly performs on the street and the stage. Jonathan holds a Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology from Duke University and is a Professor of Music at College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine.

Acknowledgements

This essay draws on the presentation the Arts & The Anthropocene team gave during the virtual opening of the Spectral Seas exhibit. Team Members: Elizabeth Albright, Chaya Brennan Agarwal, Mingyong Cheng, Will Cioffi, Justin Cook, Mila de Souza, Ke Ding, Kendall Jefferys, Madison Griffin, Joyce Gu, Kate Kelley, Sarah Kelso, Ayesham Khan, Lizzy Kramer, Kathleen Mason, Mark Olson, Jessica Orzulak, Alison Rosenbaum, Hillary Smith, Jessica Wang, Donovan Zimmerman.

1 "Overview: North Carolina's Sea Level is Rising: And it's Costing over \$2 Billion," <https://sealevelrise.org/states/north-carolina/> (accessed 5 July 2023).

2 Video of the installation: <https://vimeo.com/543210487>

3 StoryMaps: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/095b06ed91fe480585450bc17309d5a2>

WHERE DO I COME FROM? WHAT AM I? WHERE AM I GOING? THE PROBLEM OF SELF-DISCOVERY IN ART MAKING AS RESEARCH INQUIRY

Edward Hanfling

Art schools situated within tertiary education institutions have, in recent decades, established art making as a form of research, variously called practice-based research, practice-led research and practice as research. Artists working within academia are assessed on their research outputs, while fostering rigorous research methods amongst their students (most explicitly at postgraduate level). But compared to other academic disciplines, it can be difficult to clearly identify the research contribution of an artwork or art project. This is especially the case with works and projects that focus largely on self-expression and self-discovery – where the artist is both the researcher and the subject of the research inquiry. Such cases continue to be prevalent within art schools, despite students' exposure to a range of theoretical and cultural frameworks that question individualism and anthropocentrism – from the post-structuralist challenge to originality to post-humanist notions of distributed agency to the collectivism of *te ao Māori*.

Recent phenomena, such as the narcissism of social media, the isolation of COVID lockdowns, the destigmatisation of mental health and the wellness industry may have contributed to the tendency for tertiary art students to turn in on themselves and become self-preoccupied, even self-indulgent, in their approach. This article considers the legitimacy of self-discovery in art making as research inquiry, looking for guidance to values and conventions both art historical and associated with the contemporary art world (the 'industry' or field that ostensibly shapes art school pedagogy).

The first section, "There is no 'I' in research," presents the argument that "practice as research" exceeds the simple self-expression found in some art "practice." It notes, however, the influential history of expressionist artists such as Paul Gauguin, who were seen to have expressed their inner sense of self, according to the romantic trope, but in fact registered productive tensions between 'self' and 'world'.

The second section, "The 'I' in research," examines possibilities for autobiographical research projects, drawing comparisons between art practice as research and autoethnography, and suggesting that both depend on an acknowledged relational sense of self. It proceeds to examine examples of contemporary art practice that challenge individualism and self-scrutiny in contemporary culture.

The third section, "Where am I going?," takes up the idea that the originality or research contribution of an art-making project rests in tensions or dissonances between the artist and their environment and materials. The case study presented here is a Master's painting project, which shows the artist steering away from an expressionist manner towards more unpredictable collaborations with non-human factors.

Ultimately, this article raises as many questions as answers about what differentiates practice as research from practice more generally. There can be no purely self-expressive art; any artwork will reveal that the self is always already not the self; the artist is embedded in a welter of human and non-human connections. In practice as research, however, it is possible to identify problems with self-indulgence, as well as the benefits of the researcher deliberately tackling potentially dissonant relationships with the world around them.

THERE IS NO 'I' IN RESEARCH

'Practice as research' refers to methods and values fostered within tertiary-level art schools, particularly at postgraduate level. The term identifies a difference between a kind of critically informed and appraised contemporary art from which art schools take their cue, on the one hand, and other kinds of art – contemporary in the loose sense of something that is done now, but popular, commercial or amateur. Those are descriptions, not judgements, because all art has value for somebody. But within the contemporary art world and within art schools, judgements are legitimately made to distinguish art that connects and extends (disciplines, fields, issues, communities, concepts, sites) from that made for purely therapeutic reasons ("I make it for me"). The art school and the art world have a reciprocal relationship. Values and conventions upheld within academia derive from the wider field of practice. But there are differences too. In the exhibiting venues of the art world, the research behind an artwork is not always spelled out. In academia, because artworks cannot be merely assumed to embody knowledge, the research contribution must be communicated additionally through documentation of process and written and oral contextualisation, with reference to established fields of practice and theory.¹ However, compared to other academic disciplines, the research contribution of an artwork or art project can be difficult to clearly identify or demonstrate.

Certainly, originality and innovation are indelibly associated with the history of art, not least since the emergence of the mid-late nineteenth-century avant-garde, or, backtracking, the expressive romantic genius. Unfortunately, these models of making are often misconstrued as simply self-expression and self-discovery. Consider Paul Gauguin's monumental 1897 painting, *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Vigorous paint-handling and amplified, almost intoxicating, colours suggest his concern with heightened states of mind and feeling. Along with Vincent van Gogh and Edvard Munch, Gauguin is rightly seen to have shifted painting away from what things look like and toward the subjective and emotional experience of the artist, paving the way for generations of 'expressionists' in the twentieth century. However, as egregiously self-possessed as Gauguin evidently was, and however symptomatic his art might be of personal (and, to the viewer, incomprehensible) neuroses and fantasies, or indeed of his desperate personal circumstances, the title of his 'masterpiece,' along with the allegorical, female-centric imagery, nonetheless signals an attempt to penetrate broader human truths than his own immediate emotions: it says "We," not "I."

Gauguin would not have thought about his paintings as 'practice,' let alone 'practice as research,' and his 'concepts' were wildly grandiose. Yet they reflect an attitude of persistent searching, and an inquiry into tensions between his sense of self and his social and material environments, registering the symptoms of modernity (in France and Tahiti) and wider (mis)understandings of the 'primitive' basis of human life. This was not just an outpouring of "unfettered subjectivity."² At the same time, Gauguin and other historical 'expressionists' offer compelling precedents for treating art as a means of communicating individual 'truths,' and it may even be the case that the contemporary art world (as distinguished above from popular and other expressions of creativity) admits such practices. Here, then, despite the fact that art school pedagogy takes its cues from the art world, it becomes necessary to distinguish between 'practice,' as it takes place out in that world, and 'practice as research,' as it takes place in academia.

Practice as research is expected to communicate new knowledge or "substantial new insights."³ Arguably, an artist, whether or not affiliated with a research institution, could produce such insights simply by putting their work out in the world, making it available to an audience, thereby changing that world, and that audience, even if ever so slightly – modifying perceptions, opening up new ways of seeing, thinking and feeling, sparking discussion. But when the work seems primarily to invite discussion only of the artist themselves – when it is an introspective, solipsistic reflection on matters peculiar to the individual, their state of mind, opinions, preoccupations – then it becomes more difficult to justify as research or to shape into a research project.

While artists are frequently heard to utter such self-justifying phrases as "I do it for myself" or "I need to be true to myself," a respected researcher in, say, the humanities or sciences, would be unlikely to couch their activities in such terms. Research carries a duty to an audience and discipline.

Of course, artists justifiably demand freedom from expectation; there is no point in consciously trying to make art to satisfy a certain group of people or make a conspicuous, tangible difference in the world. You probably have to really want to do what you are doing, be sure of your own identity as a person and an artist and insulate yourself against the demands of the art world and the art market if you are going to keep at making art. Perhaps such an attitude is conducive to making a research contribution, too. But there is also the danger that it might replicate that which is already known and familiar in contemporary life.

The prevailing cultural climate is one that might well drive the art student towards a self-expressive mode of making. Online social networking platforms, while sometimes enabling connection, including whakapapa relationships,⁴ are also breeding grounds for narcissism and self-absorption,⁵ and for manipulative messages of self-empowerment, all demanding buy-in (literally) to neo-liberal individualism through the illusion of discovering the 'true self'. The lure of self-improvement through body image is brilliantly speared in Amalia Ulman's 2014 Instagram performance, *Excellences & perfections*, in which she appears to undergo a transformative makeover; including breast reduction, to a mix of encouraging and horrified responses from her followers; the artwork turns out to be *about* self-expression, rather than an instance of it. The online world is dominated by the outward exposure of acts of personal inward scrutiny, and COVID lockdowns have seemingly intensified this tendency, registering the retreat of students into isolation, away from the campus, and the ensuing focus on self that this inevitably engenders.⁶ The gradual destigmatisation and diagnosing of mental health conditions has also contributed to the emergence of a generation who are hyper-aware of their own moods and mind-states, and willing to reveal them to others – haunting alienation captured in a photographic self-portrait or paint-splattered nightmarish visions.

For the artist researcher, publicly exhibiting personal issues could raise ethical concerns. 'Potential harm' is a concept applied in research ethics to consider whether the risks of a research project involving human participants are outweighed by the benefits, or mitigated by the methods adopted.

Harm can be psychological, physical or reputational, and can befall the researcher themselves, not just their participants, when dealing with traumatic issues or events. Art projects typically do not involve human participants (audience members are generally not considered participants, because data is not collected or analysed and they are not the subjects of study), but where an artist is delving into their own experience, which might be of an unsettling or upsetting nature, there is the potential for deteriorating mental health or for personal revelations the exposure of which might sooner or later be regretted. Research typically involves a considerable investment of time, and if that time is spent reflecting upon one's state of mind, the researcher might find themselves in a black hole of anguish, anxiety, depression and self-denigration. Perhaps sharing these feelings is therapeutic for the researcher and helpful for others with similar experiences, but equally it could be humiliating and damaging.

In studying towards a degree or postgraduate qualification, pursuing research on top of practice, there are grounds for ensuring that you are doing more than simply satisfying yourself. Besides potentially being uninteresting to anyone other than the artist, self-preoccupied art resists interpretation or assessment, for there is no means of measuring or demonstrating the extent to which the work is or is not true to the artist's own sense of self.

Australian art history and theory professor Andrew McNamara's "Six rules for practice-led research" includes, at number two, "Avoid recourse to one's own experience as the basis or justification of the research ambition."⁷ (And that comes hot on the heels of rule 1: "Eliminate – or at the very least, limit – the use of the first person pronoun, 'I,' as a centrepiece of a research formulation."⁸) McNamara elaborates:

Should the goal of PLR be to make sense of a practitioner's own life or experience? ... Sorry, but the answer is 'no'! Rather, the goal of research – in all its forms – should be to explain something of significance and of broader relevance to a research community; this may be a larger, cross-disciplinary research community, or it may be a wider public audience.⁹

His parting shot: "Always remember: the criterion ... remains its contribution to knowledge, not to psychotherapy!"¹⁰

THE 'I' IN RESEARCH

More amenable to self-expression in practice as research is another Australian art academic, Robert Nelson, in his book *The Jealousy of Ideas*. Even so, he feels compelled to admit: "In no other discipline would autobiography be academically acceptable."¹¹ In fact, autobiographical modes of research are respected across numerous disciplines, particularly in the social sciences and humanities – anthropology, history and education – not to mention the literary genre of autobiography itself. Of autobiography in history, Jaume Aurell and Rocio G Davis conclude: "Texts that blend life writing and history deserve scholarly attention because of the ways they allow us to examine our access to both individual and collective pasts."¹²

A useful comparison with the role of the self in art practice as research can be found in the literature on autoethnography, a research method widely applied across a range of disciplines, and, like art, relatively recently accepted as legitimate academic research. In autoethnography, the researcher's own experience forms the primary data, leading to the possibility, as in artistic expression, of outcomes that are of little relevance to others,¹³

or seem self-indulgent.¹⁴ The credibility of autoethnography rests on the way it draws attention to, firstly, a widespread wilful blindness to the presence of subjectivity in all research methods, and, conversely, on an acknowledgement of the extent to which the researcher's perceptions and experiences are *not* subjective, but rather shaped by innumerable social and cultural influences and interactions. Perhaps, likewise, the foregrounding of the self in practice as research might be evaluated on the extent to which it evidences an awareness of the 'I' as embedded, entangled, multiple, changing and relational, not autonomous, self-governing or unique. For Arthur P Bochner, a leading exponent of autoethnography, the basis of his method is not narcissism but "connection,"¹⁵ and a "relational ethics of caring and community."¹⁶ Or as Jane Edwards puts it, "Writing autoethnographic accounts of self-experience necessarily involves others."¹⁷

Art history and theory or contextual courses taught within art school programmes routinely emphasise this relational sense of self, charting the various tendencies in post-1960s theory that challenge the autonomy of the individual and the assumption that the meaning or content of an artwork comes purely from 'within,' from heart and soul. They give account of post-structuralism and post-modernism, identity as a product of language, social and cultural contexts and systems, the 'death of the author,' the loss of faith in originality or the artwork as a unique manifestation of a unique individual. Histories of feminism and theories of cultural identity reveal personal stories or lived experience, but always in solidarity with larger social justice causes and activist movements. More recently, the 'material turn' has provided a popular framework for emphasising that authorship is distributed across a network of non-human 'actants,' and that materials have lives that matter, too.

Also increasingly visible are indigenous frameworks of knowledge that espouse collectivism rather than individualism. This is admirably reflected, in the wider field of practice, by the mahi of the Mata Aho Collective (Erena Baker, Sarah Hudson, Bridget Reweti and Terri Te Tau). If pedagogical principles and judgements derive from the values of the contemporary art world, the Walters Prize, Aotearoa New Zealand's most prestigious and lucrative art award, held bi-annually at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki with an exhibition of four finalists and a prize of NZ\$50,000, should be seen as a critical precedent. In 2021, the Prize was awarded to the Mata Aho Collective and Maureen Lander for their collaborative installation, *Atapō* (2020).

The judge, Kate Fowle, director of MoMA PSI, New York, could not travel to Auckland to see the finalists' exhibition due to COVID restrictions. Noting that the four nominated artworks "bring nuanced perspectives on social, cultural and political urgencies of our time that each deserve our attention and engagement," she opted not to evaluate the works themselves, but rather to celebrate the ethos of collaboration that underpinned the work of the Mata Aho Collective and Lander.¹⁸ One might be wary of rhetoric that romanticises collaboration as a simplistic reaction against the avant-garde's romanticisation of the individual, especially given that we all automatically operate within tacit collectives that include the input of languages, existing practices and theories, materials, implements, animals

and environmental factors. Nonetheless, Fowle's Walters Prize judgement registers the relevance of challenges to Western individualism in recent art history. As Lucy Lippard states, "Collaboration – the social extension of the collage aesthetic – has long been an antidote to the powerful sense of alienation that characterises late capitalism, which divides and separates through specialisation at the same time that it homogenises."¹⁹

WHERE AM I GOING?

Self-discovery is a common theme within student art projects, and need not, in itself, undermine the credibility of such projects as research. Personal interest is presumably the reason for any research project to exist at all. Indeed, there is ample evidence for the impossibility of altogether disregarding or suppressing the role of personal feeling or subjectivity. Even the most seemingly impersonal and systems-based artforms of the 1960s – colour field painting, minimalism, pop art, conceptual art – have been found to have failed to eliminate the subjective 'I,' and to rather betray, as Eve Meltzer puts it, "the artist's profound and rather amorous attachment"²⁰ to a visual language that signifies "objectivity and scientificity"²¹ – an emotional renunciation of emotion, as it were.

However, there is a sense in which the artist as researcher is required to renounce their own sense of self, and to ask not "who am I?" but "where am I going?" The research process might involve letting go of certain preconceptions about who they are, and about the art as an expression of an immutable sensibility. This would accord with David Rousell and Fiona Fell's "vision of arts education as a collective process of becoming a work of art, rather than an individual process of becoming an artist;"²² and with Simon O'Sullivan's suggestion that art can be a "technology of contact with an outside to our 'selves' as well as a name for the different kinds of assemblages and constructions that follow from this contact."²³ The research contribution of an artwork, then, might be described as what happens when an artist registers and reflects on dissonances or collisions between self, subject, materials, field, discipline and world.

Amanda Watson had an established career as a (loosely speaking) abstract expressionist painter before she embarked on the Master of Arts that she completed at Wintec, Hamilton, in 2019. Her paintings were built up in layers of gestural mark-making, sometimes with elements of geometry, the combination evocative of both 'natural' and architectural environments. She described her work as "personal," but informed by her experience of people and places, the forms and gestures bound up "in the processes and systems that occur in the natural environment."²⁴ The relational sense of self was already acknowledged in the practice before undertaking a practice as research project.

The project, however, led Watson to ask further questions about her relationship to the environment and to her medium, and she sought a process of making that reduced her own conscious control and increased the potential for revealing how places and materials acted upon her. She would trek large, loose canvases through difficult terrain and dense bush, laying them over rocks and between plants, pouring ink onto the crumpled surfaces, gathering indexical traces that were then supplemented by studio-based phases working from memory, photographs and feelings. The resulting pictures, such as *Whaingaroa Raglan, April 2018 & March 2019*; *Near the Source of the Kapuni River, Taranaki June 2019*; *In My Studio in Hamilton 2019* (2020), have a density of visual information, rich and detailed, but impervious to any obvious interpretation, nor immediately beguiling or beautiful. Watson's methodology drew from Donna Haraway's belief that new knowledge emerges from unpredictable encounters between people and other beings and things.²⁵ In reflecting on the project, Watson writes of the awkwardness of these encounters, but also the freedom of limiting her own sphere of influence on the work.²⁶ She does not overstate the latter: "I hope that this approach to painting has reduced my agency as artist slightly."²⁷ The significance of the research lies in a body of complex pictorial works, tracing conscious, difficult and unpredictable shifts in the artist's interactions with places and materials.

CONCLUSION

The notion of research as the individual pursuit of new knowledge resonates equally with the artist as with the academic, one buried in the studio (or perhaps starving in a garret), the other in the ivory tower. The romantic artist trope, however (or the artist as “queer fish,” as Rudolf Wittkower put it),²⁸ culminated in the attitude that art could not be studied in an academy at all. The very existence of art schools presupposes the possibility of communities of practice, and of collaborations both strategic and tacit, between people and their environments and materials. In art practice as research, a primary focus on the self can lead to a state of stasis and delusion. The artist who believes they are staying true to who they think they are can end up, ironically, misrepresenting themselves as just one, obdurate self out of a complex assemblage of selves, finding only what they already know about who they are, rather than what their work might become.

Research demands movement, a spirit of ceaseless, curious inquiry, embracing the unfamiliar, confronting what is not yet known or understood. An artist might turn in on themselves precisely because they find there a familiar constant (or the illusion of one) in their struggle with an incomprehensible world-out-there – at least, that is the romantic or expressionist cliché. Practice as research is an inquiry not just into what that struggle means for the artist, but what it means for others and for a discipline or field. Ideally, the research effects some change, albeit small, in both the researcher and the fields and disciplines with which they engage.

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WHAT GROWS ON WHALE REMAINS?

Vincent Chevillon



Figure 1. Vincent Chevillon, whale bones from Strasbourg Museum.

INTRODUCTION

Objects are landscapes.

As we walk through them, stories are told and inscribed.

Our eyes generally stop on asperities, singularities and accidents. These indicators become signposts for experts.

The articulation of these dis/orders produce tracks, their interpretation generates stories.

I started following the whale 13 years ago.

At the time, it seemed necessary to me to complete my practice using interdisciplinary fields of knowledge and non-linear practices foreign to the teaching that I had received at the Beaux Arts in Paris. I grew up overseas in Martinique, then on Réunion Island, in the Indian Ocean east of Madagascar. The island I grew up on was steeped in colonised histories. When I started following the whale of my story, my conscience was concerned with the Eurocentrism of the prevailing discourses, and I wanted to explore this in connection to the whale. I had an opportunity to be hosted in Paris within a research program, and this geographical, symbolic and historical situation was particularly precious to me. This led me to explore the way the West had looked at the rest of world from the objects it had brought back from the 'margins' and deposited in one of these world heritage 'centres.' Not knowing exactly where to start, I decided on an object to unravel, seeing where it would lead me. This object was waiting for me fortuitously on a friend's shelf in a Parisian apartment. It was *Moby-Dick, or The Whale*. During the first part of this journey, Herman Melville was my guide. By following a new itinerary in the wake of whales, a whole complex and fascinating set of causalities and new relationships was revealed, as much through exhumed stories as through the current environmental awareness of industrialised societies.

I was led to explore archives and museum storerooms. Places where objects are waiting. In "The Sperm Whaler's Dream" project, I set out to deconstruct and explore the myths of modernity through observation and in-depth study of the stories and objects brought back from overseas to the industrial cities of the West during the colonial period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The devices and discourses associated with public collections and their evolution since the eighteenth century fascinated me and led me to work in different institutions across France and Belgium. In this study of colonial collections, I have lingered in the archives and storerooms of institutions dedicated to natural history, places where objects and stories lay waiting. I have worked from travellers' accounts, including those of Captain Cook, Bougainville, Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin, with objects from ethnographic collections in different Parisian institutions, from photographs of the colonial era and from maps.

From observing and questioning the histories of these encounters, I responded in my arts practice with objects, gestures, images and scenic devices in order to propose alternative dramaturgies. The "Sperm Whaler's Dream" project developed from this first phase. What would singular arrangements in a new synthesis tell us and tell each other?

The "Sperm Whaler's Dream" used an experimental methodology which allowed an interconnected approach exploring the co-existence of scholarly, sensitive and immersive approaches. My growing interest for the elaboration of the 'History' led me to develop new tools to think, to weigh and to develop our imagination influenced by the methodologies of Aby Warburg through his atlas Mnemosyne and Georges Didi-Huberman, the reflections of Antonin Artaud on the theater, of Jean Luc Godard on the 'History', of Donna Haraway about sympoiesis, of Edouard Glissant on the hybridity and the survivals, of Frantz Fanon on the construction of the identities in dominated countries, writings of travellers, of the dreams carried by the subjects of an empire, of the construction of sequenced narratives through the comic strip, or still of the study of the divinatory systems by association of images such as in the divinatory tarot, or in the templum or the Greek haruspices. These all shaped a set of practices and influenced a complex entity I created that I have named Spermwhaler's dream (Spw'd). Spw'd an interactive notebook, initially inspired by the encyclopedic meanderings in the novel *Moby Dick*, is situated at the crossroads of multiple disciplines (iconography, sociology, psychoanalysis, history, natural sciences, applied sciences, visual arts, literature, cinema, programming). The project now sits in Archipels as an atlas of sorts where it gathers, organizes and presents.

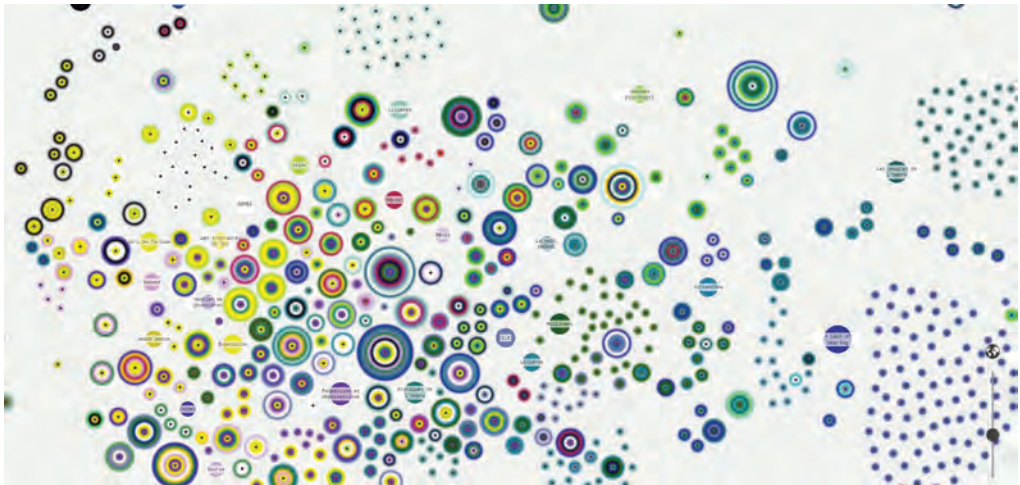


Figure 2. Atlas, Archipels front page.



Figure 3. Example page of Virtual Table, Edges (the shadow peoples).

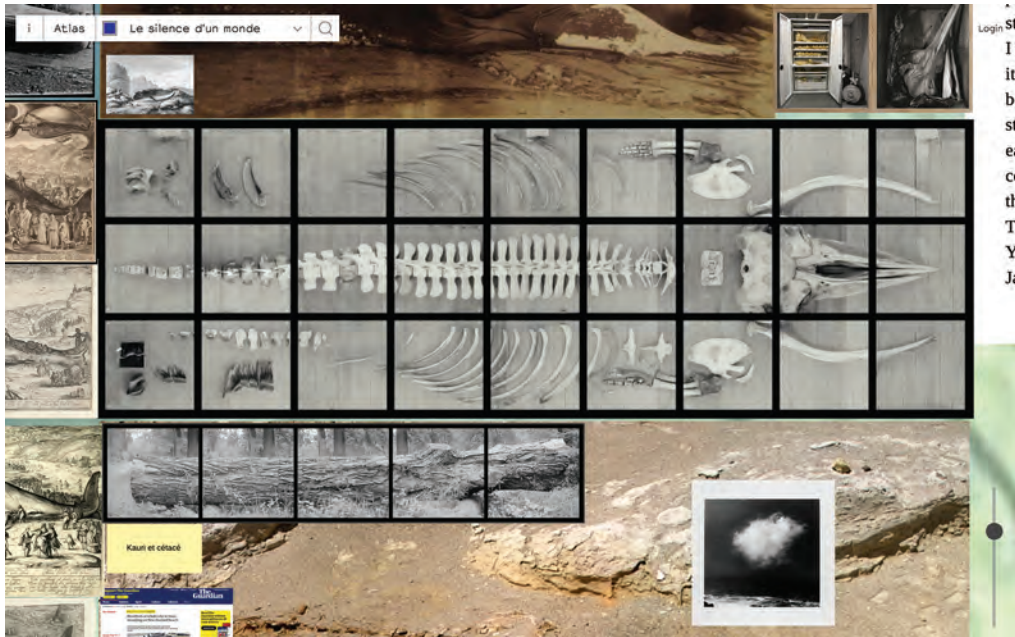


Figure 4. Whale skeleton laid out on the floor at Strasbourg Museum, 2019. Screen grab from Archipels.

THE STRASBOURG WHALES

In 2019, I was confronted with a fascinating situation: whales stranded on the attic floor of an Alsatian museum. Gigantic whale skeletons had been spread out by scientists to learn more about them. I was familiar with these bones because I had photographed some of them a few years earlier. They had been stored in old wooden cabinets in the attic hallway, and a small room filled with bones and other marine mammal remains.

The information we had about these bones was very poor: A significant amount of material had been lost, especially during the two world wars. Most of these collections were acquired in the late nineteenth century when Strasbourg was German. The museum had opened in 1893 as part of an ambitious plan to transform Strasbourg into one of the most modern universities in the world, at least in the young German Empire. After World War I, Strasbourg became French, and these bones retreated into the dark forgotten spaces of the attic.

The largest of the skeletons was that of a baleen whale, nearly 10 metres long. On each bone, a small letter, a capital B, had made it possible to gather the bones together and to arrange them on the ground, in order to reconstitute the individual. Among the bones, a box containing dewlap was labeled in German: "Walbarten zum Skelet B, auf dem Boden, *Balaenoptera sulfurea*, Neu-Seeland.," which indicated that the box contained "baleen hairs corresponding to skeleton 'B' on the ground, *Balaenoptera sulfurea*, from New Zealand." At the bottom of the box, wrapped in a newspaper, we found two bones, tympanic bullae, each the size of a large lemon, also with the inscription 'B.' The newspaper was *The New Chivalry* from Nelson, New Zealand, and was dated 15 October 1905.

Using this information, Marie Meister, one of the curators, managed to find a small envelope in the archives containing letters addressed to the then director, Ludwig Döderlein. These letters, written by a certain James Dall, proposed items of interest for sale to the Strasbourg Museum, including cetacean bones from a whale stranding near Collingwood in Golden Bay (New Zealand).¹ Two of the specimens in the Strasbourg collections corroborated



Figure 5. Tympanic bullae found wrapped in an old newspaper from New Zealand. Screenshot from Archipels.

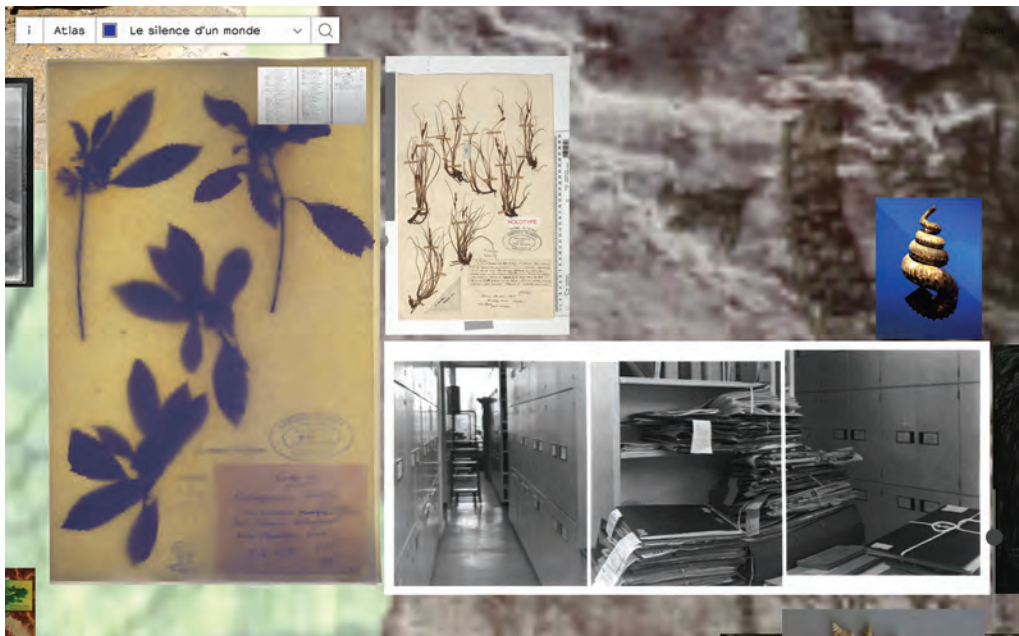


Figure 6. Botanical specimens collected by James Dall, now in Te Papa Collections, Wellington. Screenshot from notebook.

the information contained in this letter: James Dall was also a collector of botanical specimens and the archival material also held letters offering "herbariums of new and remarkable compositions of dried plants," plus associated comments, names of people and places and chemicals such as mercury chloride, a poison used as a preservative. About a hundred plants collected by Dall are now preserved in the collections of Te Papa Tongarewa.² The places of conservation are paradoxical universes, aseptic, cold, hostile to life and yet dedicated to its study. A certain number of these collections have passed in less than a century from the domain of biology to that of archaeology, and our museums and their reserves accumulate successive layers of shelves and boxes where are stored the productions of the beings that have populated our worlds. These successive layers are not unlike the sedimentary layers where fossil remains are sometimes exhumed to land in these same shelves.

Department of Conservation (New Zealand), which has been recording cetacean stranding data for the past 50 years, specifies the location, date, space and number of individuals affected. The Strasbourg whales most likely stranded on Farewell Spit, a sand strip that curves around Golden Bay at the northern end of Te Waipounamu (the South Island, New Zealand). For centuries, cetaceans have been stranding en masse or individually on this particular landscape feature, which creates a natural trap. Of note, very recently in 2017 there were strandings of more than 600 *Globicephala melas* (blackfish or pilot whales); in one instance 400 individuals were stranded in a single event.³

It is difficult to see long distances underwater; and cetaceans have developed singular sensory apparatus to enable them to imagine and navigate the worlds that surround them. Hearing plays an essential role here. The bones wrapped in the Nelson newspaper of 1905 were the tympanic bullae of the rorqual whale (genus *Balaenoptera*). The tympanic bullae are an essential part of the eco-sensory organ that allows whales to visualise their underwater surroundings in three dimensions. One of the hypotheses about the strandings of cetaceans at Farewell Spit is poor visualisation of space, due to the shallowness of the sea here caused by the parabolic curve of the bay. The eco-location sounds are absorbed by the sand and, with no return of signal, the cetaceans would perceive the bay as open space as they travel toward the Tasman Sea. They then sometimes tragically strand on the sandbanks.

Another curious resonance for the whale project came from the masthead of the newspaper, *The New Chivalry*, that enveloped the tympanic bullae: "Reform often fails not for lack of merit *but for lack of a hearing* [emphasis added]."⁴ If an absence of conscience can be linked to the shortcomings of audiences, it can also derive from a lack of listening. The presence of these "hearing" organs in a political prospectus addressed to the working classes brings together universes with a priori distinctiveness, including the civilised and the wild, culture and the nature, and addresses us from the past as a curious message that echoes our present societal and climatic crisis.

A LACK OF HEARING

It is particularly this synchronicity found in the *The New Chivalry's* masthead that led me to follow the wake of these whales across the world to the coasts of Aotearoa. With the support of the French Institute and Massey University, I was received in residence at Te Whare Hera. This stay in Wellington has allowed me to collaborate with experts, to visit collections, to explore archives and to cross-reference a significant number of documents and discourses, places and objects. Unlike a scientific practice, my inquiry does not consist of exploring in one direction or one area. It is the elements, their in situ arrangement and the reading of their interactions that guide me and lead me onwards. By exploring different elements or resources in the same space, links are made. Analogies, connections, contrasts and synergies are created by putting them in the presence of each other, allowing for the discovery of casual and causal links.

Archipels is my notebook and working area to display and visualise documents of different natures on the same (virtual) surface. Archipels creates a vast composition which in turn creates new pathways which enables me to rethink and see the interplay between elements. The platform helps to reorient me and to build collages and montages which in turn become the basis for future installations, objects, editions and images.



Figure 7. Vincent Chevillon, *Time lapses us*, 2021, installation view, solo exhibition from the "Edges" series, former sacristy of the Collège des Bernardins, Paris.



Figure 8. Vincent Chevillon, *The Pit*, 2021, Vidéo projection, installation view, Nuit Blanche, Grande nef du collège des Bernardins, Paris.

On one virtual table, "A lack of hearing, the silence of a world," presents a selection of documents involved in the current investigation initiated by the cetacean bones preserved in Strasbourg. It includes research carried out prior to my visit to Aotearoa, including a selection of reported accounts and encounters of cetacean strandings. The most recent images are my photographs taken at the sites of these strandings. I am interested in comparing these representations and situating them within the attitudes of people of the time and their ideas about the leviathans of the sea.

Among the most instructive images I have discovered is a series of Dutch engravings from the early seventeenth century. Here, I can observe a whole series of common customs, ranging from investigation (sampling and measuring) to entertainment and spectacle, with depictions of various people from across different social classes. While the various engravings represent different events, the formal qualities of the prints suggest that one particular engraving served as an exemplar in relation to those that followed. To follow the trace of these images is to explore along an edge. While weaving between different time periods and placing signposts on Archipels, my tracks are drawn, past and current tragedies are outlined.

It is a question of edges, that is to say etymologically of ruts and borders. These margins are not yet borders, in the contemporary sense of lines that separate, but rather an inbetween that links heterogeneous elements. Our representation of the world is built here by the periphery, from where these forgotten and badly identified objects, these places impossible to name and to locate. It is not the delimitation that makes the territory but the game of tracks. It is not the resolution of the enigma that interests him but rather his ability to catch other threads, other narratives, other places and to install a generative process without limits, an archipelago of points connected to each other by networks hitherto unseen. Between these different clues, between these arrangements and their representation, another space is created, a new imaginary which explains the feeling of strangeness that one feels. The production of images that sharpen knowledge rather than a production of knowledge about images.⁵

"Grégory Quenet"

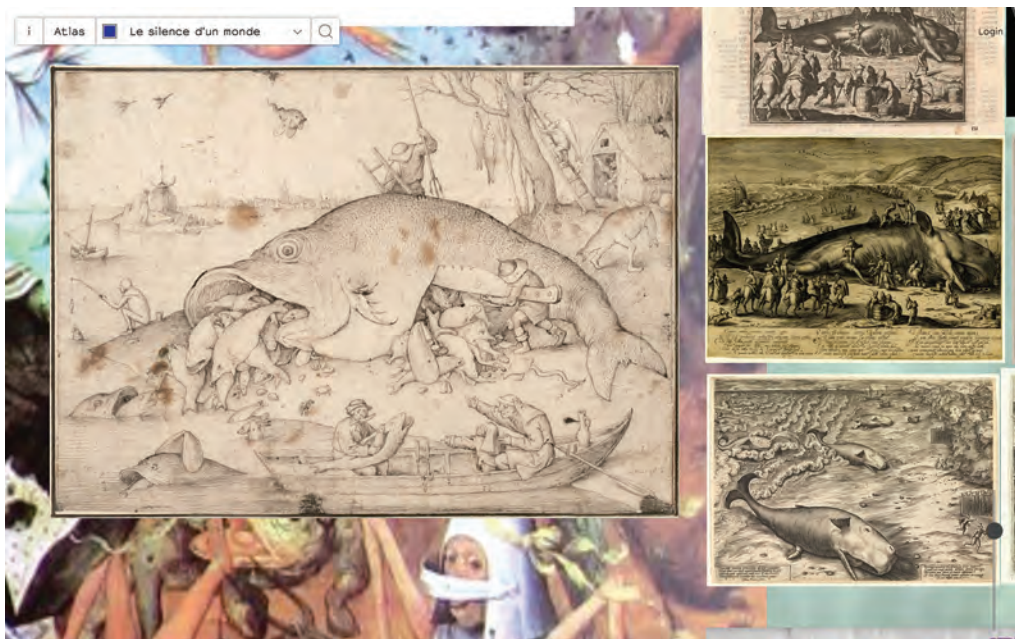


Figure 9. Series of Dutch engravings and a drawing by Pieter Bruegel. Screenshot from Archipels.

In regard to this purpose, I would like to share with you a story about the whale and the kauri tree, told to me by Shaquille Shortland, director of Tūāpapa Māori Language Academy. He begins by telling of the familial, physical and loving bonds between Kauri and Tohorā (the whale), but also the iwi's lust for them. Aspiring to live in different environments and under pressure from the iwi, these two giants will be separated and will maintain contact by any means possible through their relationship with their environment (sap tears, whale breath). After a number of troubles and exchanges, a peace will be concluded to unite the iwi with these two giants in salutary interdependence.

We all need such stories to imagine alternatives and possibilities of living together in order to face the ecological disaster of which we are the witnesses and the actors. This story skillfully responds to this need, but also to the one-sided economic dynamics induced by the exploitation of the two species by industrial societies. On Archipels, I find and display further images in light of this story. The proximity between the images of felled trunks and beached cetaceans reveals other surprisingly explicit details, such as human figures walking on top of the collapsed bodies of these giants.

While researching cetacean remains at Otago Museum, Dunedin, New Zealand, I was confronted at the entrance to the museum with a curious artifact, a gigantic section of a kauri tree. To the rings of this tree had been added in gold letters dates captioned according to a chronology that culminated in the founding of Otago.

On the right side:

1492: Columbus discovers America 1588: Armada defeated
1665: Great Plague
1759: Wolfe takes Quebec
1805: Trafalgar
1815: Waterloo

On the left side:

1642: Tasman sights Westland 1770: Cook sights Molyneux
1792: *Britannia* lands sealers at Dusky Sound
1817: Kelly burns Murdering Beach village
1848: Otago founded

In what other ways could we name our past? The way we name our roots will determine the fruits that will grow there. The same holds true for naming plants and shells. They are named as cultural markers, names of gods, kings, scholars, fathers or mothers, and thus inscribe a human heritage in the components of a world.

This reminded me of another story related to trees, for which I must return to our beached whales in Golden Bay. The name that Pākehā gave to this bay is also related to exploitation. Why Golden Bay? Because gold was found there in 1857. But 15 years earlier, it was called Coal Bay because coal was found there. And before that, Massacre Bay by the Frenchman Dumont d'Urville, Blind Bay by Captain Cook and Murderers' Bay by the Dutchman Abel Tasman after a confrontation with Māori. These different names show a lack of communication, a lack of listening, as an older name also refers to its history. I have heard that the Māori name for this bay is Mohua. It is also the name of a bird that was quite common before the nineteenth century on this part of the island. It was probably the song of these birds that Joseph Banks described in his journal on 17 January 1770, in a moving passage written during the ship's stay not far from there at Tōtaranui, Queen Charlotte Sound:

This morn I was awakd by the singing of the birds ashore from whence we are distant not a quarter of a mile, the numbers of them were certainly very great who seemd to strain their throats with emulation perhaps; their voices were certainly the most melodious wild musick I have ever heard, almost imitating small bells but with the most tuneable silver sound imaginable to which maybe the distance was no small addition.⁶

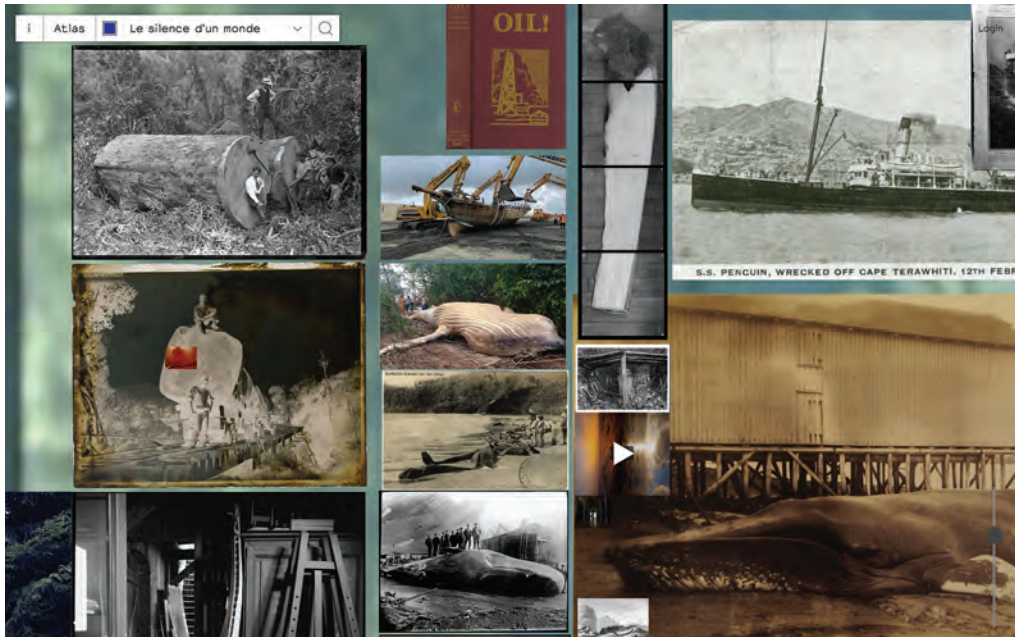


Figure 10. Screengrab from notebook. Correspondence between Kauris and whales exploitation and ships, 2023.

These birds are also called Te Tini o te Hākuturi, "The Myriad Hākuturi," guardian spirits of the forest. A story from Ngāti Mahuta tells how these birds prevented Rata from cutting down a tree until the latter expressed remorse. Once remorse was expressed, they built the canoe themselves. In Murdoch Riley's *Māori Bird Lore: An Introduction*, we read that the pōpokotea (whitehead) was one of the small birds chosen by Māui to accompany him on his (ultimately unsuccessful and fatal) quest to abolish death by killing Hine-nui-te-pō, the goddess of night and death.⁷

CONCLUSION

I began this article with a question:
What grows on whale remains?

This title came to me from a collage I made by juxtaposing different images of botanical specimens from the collections made by James Dall with a photograph of Dall in the background of the remains of a whale, *Berardius arnuxii*, which is now conserved in Strasbourg. On top of the whale are arranged photographic reproductions of the herbaria collected by Dall and conserved by Te Papa Tongarewa. There is something moving about these herbaria, in the position of the dried plant delicately composed to fit the surface of the leaf. A frozen time that it seemed appropriate to me to reanimate by a simple and direct collage.⁸

Through many books, the modern history of Aotearoa has been told to me of the encounters between Westerners and Māori. Many stories recall that it was whales that brought these peoples to these islands. Māori were carried by whales and the Western whalers followed the whales to fill their ships with their blubber. The French and American whalers were the first Westerners to settle down and to engage in exchange with certain Māori collectives. From these overlapping worlds, hybridities and new images are born. In English, a whale that is dying is said to be "in her flurry." The French whalers would say that a whale in its death throes "blooms." Rather than considering these vestiges as remains to be preserved from the ravages of time, could we not consider them as seeds, potential worlds

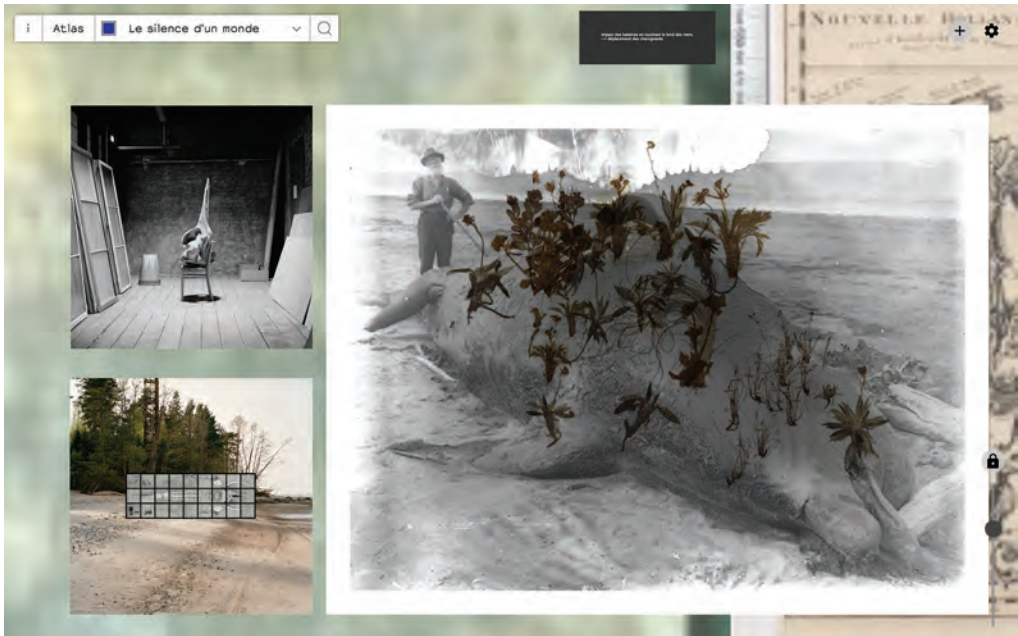


Figure 11. Synthesis of images and collage of James Dall's whale for sale, plus his "herbarium." Screenshot from Archipels.

waiting to bloom? As a whale sinks through the ocean column to the sea floor when it dies, a process known as whale fall, it becomes host to an entire ecosystem for maintaining life.⁹

The itinerary that I have presented here is far from being completed, and perhaps it will never be. As I write this story, my visa allows me to continue in New Zealand for another three months, and certainly new intrigues and encounters will be added. To follow the wake of these whales constitutes for me dynamic encounters. I meet with people, go up the course of a river to understand its tributaries and skirt by the shores of the worlds, to testify to the exchanges which are played out there. The bones may have been picked clean, but their presence is an embodiment of the search for the story of the whale which continues in the vestiges of the archival holdings that remain.

I would like to finish with the words of Quebec filmmaker Pierre Perrault. He "proposes to those who care / the least / to question, before it is too late, / this silence of the coves, heavy with incomparable words, / in order to put it in the world of language / which is indeed the only serious way / to build a country / for those who will follow."¹⁰

Initially trained in earth sciences, **Vincent Chevillon** went on to study art and in 2010 joined the post-diploma class of the Beaux-arts de Paris, La Seine. Since 2014, he has taught space and volume at the Haute Ecole des Arts du Rhin (HEAR) in Strasbourg, bringing together different fields of study, including anthropology, geophysics and iconology.

Vincent Chevillon has exhibited in France and abroad. His first show (“The Sperm Whaler’s Dream”) was exhibited in 2011 at the Pierre Bergé – Yves Saint Laurent Foundation at the Palais de Tokyo. In 2013, he spent seven months aboard a sailboat ranging widely across the Atlantic. This investigation, SEMES, received the support of the FNAGP and the DRAC Alsace and was exhibited in spring 2016 at the Espace Khiasma. Since 2013, he has been developing a participatory encyclopedic platform called Archipels with the support of several organisations (FNAGP, SCAM, Espace Khiasma, Dicream, Medialab SciencePO Paris).

His work is in several public collections. See further www.vincentchevillon.com

- 1 For photographs and transcriptions of the original letters, see Correspondance entre Dr. Döderlein et James Dale [sic], Transcription Marie Meister; Collection du musée zoologique de Strasbourg, Rockville New Zealand, Oct 8/05; To Dr L Döderlein, Zoologischen Institute Strassburg, at <https://archipels.org/atlas/lettres-oderlin>, For transcription of a letter about skeletons of marine mammals, see Correspondance de James Dall au Dr Döderlein, 8 octobre 1905, and for the transcription of a postcard on the same subject, see <https://archipels.org/atlas/skeletons-of-marine-animals> and <https://archipels.org/atlas/dolphin-one-gentleman>.
- 2 Examples include holotypes now in the collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongawera, Registration Number: SP002022/A. See <https://archipels.org/atlas/carex-dallii-kirk> and <https://archipels.org/atlas/kahurangi-pittosporum>.
- 3 Rachel Becker, “New Zealand Just Experienced its Largest Whale Stranding in Decades/The Cause is Still a Mystery,” *The Verge*, 12 February 2017, <https://www.theverge.com/2017/2/11/14587770/pilot-whales-mass-stranding-beach-new-zealand-farewell-spit>.
- 4 *The New Chivalry*, 15 October 1905. See photograph in archipels.org (Figure 2); full pages at <https://archipels.org/atlas/the-new-chivalry>.
- 5 Grégory Quenet, Introduction Text Of The Exhibition Lisières, *Stimultania*, 2021
- 6 *The Endeavour Journal of Joseph Banks 1768–1771 [Volume One]*, January 1770, <https://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Bea01Bank-t1-body-d7-d6.html>.
- 7 See Murdoch Riley, *Māori Bird Lore: An Introduction* (Paraparaumu: Viking Sevensseas, 2001) and [https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Whitehead_\(bird\)](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Whitehead_(bird)).
- 8 See conceptual work in progress, bottom left, Figure 6. Synthesis of images and collage of James Dall’s whale for sale, plus his “herbarium.” Screenshot from archipels.org. “Lack of Hearing” on Atlas.
- 9 Leo Richards, “The Stages of Whale-Fall Ecosystems,” *Natural World of Facts*, <https://www.naturalworldfacts.com/whale-fall-ecosystems>.
- 10 Pierre Perrault, *Le visage humain d'un fleuve sans estuaire* (Trois-Rivières, QC: Les Écrits des Forges, 1999).

A PRIMORDIAL TOUCH

Thomas Lord

*We are unthinkable without fungi, yet seldom do we think about them.
It is an ignorance we can't afford to sustain.*

Merlin Sheldrake¹



Figure 1. Field study of dung fungi.

At the initial presenter evening for “Art and Air,” the 2022 Art+Science event, scientists shared snippets of their research while artists described their practice. This would lead to collaborations and pairings, with the end result being an exhibition at the Dunedin Community Gallery. I was struck by Professor David Orlovich’s research on mycorrhizal fungi. He spoke passionately about these intricate systems that provide an essential link between plants, enabling them to communicate, share nutrients and defend themselves against pests and diseases. He warned that without mycorrhizal fungi many of the world’s ecosystems would not function. During his presentation, my mind wandered, thinking about the broader implications of studying and understanding this specific kind of fungi, both in terms of ecology and potentially in other fields as well. I reached out to David with the intention of learning more about these invisible networks and attempting to represent this communication photographically.

The first meeting with David led to conversations about local habitats for mycorrhizal fungi, restrictions and permits on collecting and the abundance of dung fungi in New Zealand. I wanted to start from scratch, so I also quizzed him about the most reliable way to clone and grow mycelium from a fruiting body collected in the field. My first foray into the kingdom of fungi was almost too overwhelming for anything productive to happen. Attention was firmly focussed on the forest floor where common bonnets led to lichen-covered logs, which in turn directed my awareness to some uplifted soil which revealed a thick web of mycelium – a momentary glimpse of the vast underground network. For here, in this hidden realm, there was a sense of interconnectedness and mystery that seemed to transcend the boundaries of the visible world. An abrupt gust of wind snapped me out of this new way of ecological thinking, as I returned to a standing position. But the intermission was cut short as I noticed some animal scat at eye level, balancing delicately on a leaf blade with fungi sprouting from it (Figure 1). I was in deep now and there was no turning back. Failure to acknowledge my participation in this ecosystem would be detrimental not only to the project, but also to my developing understanding of the natural world.



Figure 2. Enlarged agar plate and photogram, gelatin silver print.

My first attempts at cultivating and isolating mycelium could be regarded as beginner's luck. The intriguing layers of growth piqued my interest, prompting me to use the agar plate as a negative and enlarge the progress onto fibre-based paper as silver gelatin prints in a darkroom environment (Figure 2). While the initial results were satisfying, they were more akin to snapshots. I was eager to facilitate a longer duration and greater change through a prolonged exposure, aligning with Henry Fox Talbot's photogenic drawings, which he described as nature's magic self-manifestations and as images making themselves.² However, I encountered difficulties with accepting the separation between the mycelium and the paper, because it lacked the indexical quality or trace that I was after. These ruminations led me to contemplate the collaboration between Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp in the photographic image *Dust Breeding* (1920). This image saw Man Ray point his camera at Duchamp's work-in-progress, *The Large Glass* (1915-23), which consisted of a sheet of glass accumulating dust in his studio. After releasing the shutter, they left for lunch and returned an hour or so later to stop the exposure. *Dust Breeding* continues to spark debates regarding the medium's status concerning index and authorship, and its appearance in exhibitions of abstraction and landscape imagery. Although *Dust Breeding* is a lens-based image, as opposed to my cameraless attempts, I'm drawn to the multiple interpretive layers, as David Company explains: "In this single photograph there is an exploration of duration, an embrace of chance, spatial uncertainty, confusion of authorship and ambiguity of function."³

Somewhere, nestled between Macandrew Bay and Portobello, lies a forest remnant boasting an array of diverse broadleaf and other native trees. A friend residing on the property kept me updated with new fungi sightings throughout the year, aware of my ongoing project. On one occasion, he notified me of a rotund mushroom displaying a striking purple hue on its cap. This observation stood out to me, as David's initial presentation included a slide underscoring the significance of purple and its frequent occurrence within mycorrhizal fungi. That night, I ventured into the forest to collect the purple mushroom. As I made my way through the woods, only the occasional calls of restless korimako could be heard. Upon arriving at the mushroom's location, I buried some unexposed colour 4x5 film directly under where the fruiting body had been observed. With a handful of mycelium-rich soil and a freshly obtained fruiting body, I observed the surrounding trees and noticed a prevalence of kānuka and kōtukutuku in that specific area. Once back home, I began the process of cleaning the collected specimen, cloning it and transferring it several times. Eventually, I began to see clean growth on some of the plates. Upon sharing my findings with David, he confirmed it as an ectomycorrhizal mushroom belonging to the genus *Russula*, most likely utilising the kānuka as its host.

Previously, the image made in the darkroom was shaped through the mediation of a lens from an enlarger. Bypassing this step, and in complete darkness, I transferred the growing mycelium directly from the sterile conditions of a petri dish onto several sheets of colour film. This move favoured the medium's light-sensitive surface over the lens or the shutter, invoking Rosalind E Krauss's concept of the medium's "essential form."⁴ After safely storing the film in light-proof bags and leaving it to interact for a month, I observed how my thoughts were constantly drawn back to the slow exposure that was taking place. I envisioned vivid magentas and microscopic highways reaching in all directions across the film surface. These thoughts continued throughout the night and made me question if, through this facilitation, I had unwittingly become a host.

During this time, I also reflected on my fascination with the latent image of photography and drew connections with death. Both involve a process of transformation that occurs beyond immediate perception. In photography, the latent image refers to the invisible image created on light-sensitive material when it is exposed to light or, in this case, a living organism touching the surface directly. This image remains hidden until it is developed, revealing a visible resemblance of the original subject. Similarly, death involves a transformation of the physical body into a state that is not immediately perceptible. The deceased body may appear unchanged, but the life force has departed, leaving behind only an empty vessel. Furthermore, both the latent image and death involve a sense of impermanence and transience. The latent image is temporary and fleeting, existing only until it is developed into a visible image. Similarly, death marks the end of physical existence and the beginning of a new state of being, as part of the natural cycle of



Figure 3. *Russula 1*, C Type print on Kodak Endura Metallic Paper: 800x600mm.



Figure 4. *Russula 2*, C Type print on Kodak Endura Metallic Paper; 800x600mm.

decay and rebirth. Returning to the mycelium, mycologist Paul Stamets states in his 2005 book *Mycelium Running*, "Fungi are the interface organisms between life and death."¹⁵ In this project, the mycelium is acting as a mediator between the living and the dead, between the visible and the latent, embodying the impermanence and transience that exist in both photography and life itself.

With the help of the Sydney-based master printer, Sandra Bernard, the resulting images were brought to life. I was fortunate that she still had Kodak Endura metallic paper stock available, which provided a depth and exaggerated the purple tones, creating an almost wet appearance to the overall image (Figures 3, 4). The images were framed and laid flat on plinths at knee height. This decision was made not only to imitate the experience of looking down at a forest floor, but also to allow children to get closer to the intricate details present in the final images, which was especially important given the planned school visits to the exhibition.

Through this project I've developed a new fascination with how mycorrhizal fungi act as a vital connection between plants, allowing them to thrive and communicate with each other. Similarly, through cameraless photography I can see how these images serve as a connection between myself and the natural world. By using unconventional techniques like propagating mycelium onto film, I've been able to facilitate images that reflect the interconnectedness of nature and showcase an intricate beauty of often-overlooked organisms like fungi. This collaboration has opened new opportunities to continue to explore hidden networks that underpin the world around us and potentially uncover new forms of communication and understanding.

Thomas Lord (ORCID ID <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1486-7521>) is a current MFA candidate while also working as a Lecturer in the photography studio at the Dunedin School of Art. He has held exhibitions in painting where nostalgia, ecology and an exploration into different modes of time form a common thread between the two media.

- 1 Merlin Sheldrake, "Why the Hidden World of Fungi is Essential to Life on Earth," *The Guardian*, 10 October 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/10/hidden-world-fungi-life-earth> (accessed 9 March 2023).
- 2 Armin Zweite, *Hiroshi Sugimoto: Revolution* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2013), 23.
- 3 David Campany, "Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp: *Dust Breeding* 1920," <https://davidcampany.com/dust-breeding-man-ray-1920/> (accessed 7 March 2023).
- 4 David Campany, *A Handful of Dust* (London: Mack Books, 2017), 28. Krauss argues that the "essential form" of photography is not located in its representational content, but in its ability to reveal the physical characteristics of the medium itself, such as light, surface and chemical processes.
- 5 Paul Stamets, *Mycelium Running: How Mushrooms Can Help Save the World* (New York: Ten Speed Press, 2005), 17.

IRON AND SAND AND AIR

Locke Jean-Luc Unhold

Sand and iron-rich ochre have been used for thousands of years in pottery, both in the clay itself and as glaze materials. My work for the 2022 Dunedin Art+Science exhibition utilised paleomagnetic core samples unearthed and studied by Dr Faye Nelson.¹ I fired the samples in both glaze and clay body to create a representation of time and the physical forces our Earth undergoes.

The project started with two tubes full of material that had already been examined thoroughly by Nelson and her team. In addition, I received a large bag full of dozens of small beach samples, each identified by a string of numbers and letters. I had little knowledge of the scientific specificities that this collection held for geologists, but as a ceramicist I had an inkling of what to expect. The samples were iron-rich and contained a mixture of sand as well as shell shards. Before I could use them fully for their aesthetic properties, I would have to fire them to get a better understanding of their chemical properties.

First, the samples were fired in small dishes to 1200° Celsius to test their melt quality. Based on the nature of the samples, I knew that they would be high in silica and that some of them would have a significant iron content as well. Some would also have calcium, and potentially calcium phosphate, if there was enough shell and bone material. Silica and phosphorous are glass-forming elements in ceramic glaze, but their melting temperature is too high on their own to melt in the kilns used for ceramics. As ceramicists, we rely on fluxes like sodium, potassium, lithium, calcium and magnesium to lower their melting points. This is called a eutectic system, wherein two materials together have a lower melting point than either of the materials separately.²

The resulting sample dishes provided an array of colours, textures and melt qualities. Those that melted more proved to have more flux content within their grains and made for more promising ceramic applications. I wanted additives that would be able to melt on their own at the two main temperatures we fire ceramics: 1220° Celsius and 1285° Celsius. If the additives didn't melt, they might compromise the integrity of the clay body or stick out like shards from the glaze.

From this batch of tests, I chose six to use as glaze materials. Three of the samples I chose to fire in a commercially bought clear glaze to 1285° Celsius in a reduction (low oxygen) atmosphere. The chosen glaze was Ferro 6935, a lead-free glaze that I knew could perform equally well at either of the two temperatures planned and remain clear. The other three were fired in the same clear glaze to 1200° Celsius in an oxidation (high oxygen) atmosphere. The temperatures for each sample were chosen based on the quality of the melt of the material at 1200°C.



Figure 1. One of the fired beach samples.



Figure 2 & 3. Locke Jean-Luc Unhold, *Finale* (detail), ceramics, 2022, 200x80x80mm.

Using the samples from the tubes, I wedged the sand into white clay, chosen as it would give more room for the additives and the glaze to speak. The downside to this method is that most white clays in New Zealand require exported additives to be plastic enough for a potter to use, making the end piece not fully a product of Aotearoa. This is a compromise that sometimes must be made to achieve a desired outcome.

After bisque firing these tests to 980° Celsius, the 6935 glaze was applied and they were fired to 1200° Celsius to see the results and determine whether the sand would contribute to the appearance of the glaze and clay. As intended, both of the tube samples gave a subtle iron speckle to the clay body without interfering with the glaze much. I could now move on to combining the two elements of the tests into a singular piece.

For the piece shown in Figure 2, I created a representation of the push and pull of the tectonic plates of the Earth's crust by making two imperfect cylinders, each with one of the tube samples added to the clay. Using tools and hands, I pushed the two cylinders together, attaching them roughly. I then pulled at either end to open the joins and twisted loosely. The result is a landscape of rough crags and smooth curves, seams ripped open and re-attached.

I combined all the tested glazes in one bucket, yet only loosely stirred them together. Although the sand samples came to me in neatly ordered baggies with specific delineations, materials in situ are not so clean-cut. Seams of minerals meander through the crust and shells are deposited on shores in asymmetrical ways, so it seemed apt for the glaze to be poured across the surface of the piece, with different elements streaked through it seemingly at random. I layered the glaze on thickly, allowing for large globs to melt and pull down across the surfaces, acquiring bubbles of air trapped within.

The piece was fired to the top temperature of 1285° Celsius in a reduction atmosphere. This allowed for the iron in the glaze to create subtle yellow, green and blue tones. It also created a slight blush across the raised areas of the clay body.



Figure 4. Locke Jean-Luc Unhold, *Finale*, ceramics, 2022, 200x80x80mm.

The finished work, *Finale*, is more subtle than I anticipated. The consequences of the ebb and flow of tides on rock are too slow for a human eye to see as it occurs. Analogously, the small changes and shifts in the tide of the glaze on the surface of this piece require careful consideration. The tectonic shifts and tears of the clay are a dramatic sight, but they too have longer-lasting implications throughout the surface of the piece, dictating where the glaze pools and runs.

Undertaking these tests and creating a work from them has reinvigorated my interest in utilising found material in my work. There is a growing movement in New Zealand and around the world to return to making pottery from local materials – hand-dug clays and rocks ground to make a glaze. It roots the piece to where it is made. It is also a grounding, community-driven practice, as potters share their knowledge of locations of geological and cultural interest.

There are beautiful materials all around us, even those that at first glance may seem like just dirt or sand. But that dirt and sand has its own long history and beauty that we can highlight through both art and science together.

Locke Jean-Luc Unhold (ORCID ID <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1833-7093>) has a BA in literature from the University of Minnesota and NZDAD: Ceramics from Otago Polytechnic. He is a technician and glaze chemistry tutor at the Dunedin School of Art.

- 1 “Life’s a Gas: Art+Air” was the ninth theme in the Dunedin Art+Science project. Dr Faye Nelson is a geologist who runs the Otago Paleomagnetic Research Facility. Her research area is paleomagnetism and environmental magnetism of piston cores from the south-western coast of New Zealand. See https://issuu.com/dunedinschoolofart/docs/art_air_catalogue_2022.
- 2 Frank Hamer, *The Potter’s Dictionary of Materials and Techniques* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1975).

SEEING THROUGH THE SHADOWS: REFLECTING ON A PRACTICE IN PROGRESS

Belinda Mason

My current body of work appears, on the surface, to be completely different to anything I have ever created, and yet, looking closely, retains all of the elements I have been exploring over time. Flowers and foliage are subjects to which I have always been attracted. Colour, light, contrast, drama – elements which are all there, and yet not. What is different is the way in which all of these things come together through the push and pull of oil on canvas.

The result is a series of paintings that hint at the subject without trying to be explicit or realistic. They draw inspiration from historical and contemporary sources, borrowing heavily from photography and coming to life through a process learned from researching my practice. An excerpt from Michael Greaves' text on my solo exhibition at Wave Project Space in January 2023 says it beautifully: "You need to take a moment to understand what it is that you are seeing, like the world coming into focus ... but it does not. The paintings are elusive, colour invades your senses, but is subtle."¹



Figure 1. Main wall hang at "First Light" exhibition, Wave Project Space, Dunedin, January 2023.

PROCESS TO PRACTICE

My work relates to bokeh photography due to the soft, out-of-focus and blurred nature of the painted surface. My process has become something of a ritual, a pathway to follow. It begins with a photograph from my phone, usually of flowers, but occasionally trees and shrubs or fruit. I have always taken these photos and have, in the past, painted them as caught on camera. The introduction to an easy-to-use phone app means I can manipulate my composition quickly, blurring lines, darkening, saturating the colours. The push and pull of painting begins before I've even picked up a brush. When it's right – an instinctive measurement – I print it out in colour and that's when the next step begins.

Gridding was something I was taught early in the first year of my BVA – suggested as a way to overcome my fear of getting my drawing onto the canvas and remove the apprehension that I would 'stuff it up,' a methodology which proved to be correct. It was soothing to create a grid in soft charcoal lines, transfer my drawing and then remove much of the charcoal with a brush. One step closer. The process continues with an acrylic underwash. Using a colour that will inform the dark tones to be applied later, a light wash of the chosen colour is used as a base, determining light and dark areas with successive passes of the brush.

For a moment, everything pauses as the base coat dries and I consider what colours I want to use to approximate my photo reference. I say 'approximate' because despite working from a photograph, I don't let it fully determine the final work. At some point it becomes more about me existing inside the painting, enjoying the material quality of paint, lost in the colours and the sound of the brushes, than it does about the original study. I do refer back to the photograph from time to time, but find that if I stick to it too closely, the painting doesn't work.

It's time to begin. Paint squeezes out. The palette knife mixes colours together, sometimes thinned a little with oil and solvent. A frenzy of brushing begins: working in the first layer of oils, pushing, stroking, smoothing and finding my way in the act of putting colour on the canvas. Both slowly and quickly the layers build. I stop, look, consider, then dive back in. It's hard to stop, to decide that I am finished. I like the adage, popularly attributed to Leonardo de Vinci, that "The painting is never finished. It is the artist who is finished with the painting."

This process has become a practice, changing and evolving as I go. It orders my thoughts and allows me a degree of control, which in turn means I can be looser in my approach. A painting that is 'finished' gives me joy, a feeling that it is right, complete, sensual, fabulous, fantastic. I keep going back to look, as if to reassure myself that the feeling is still there.

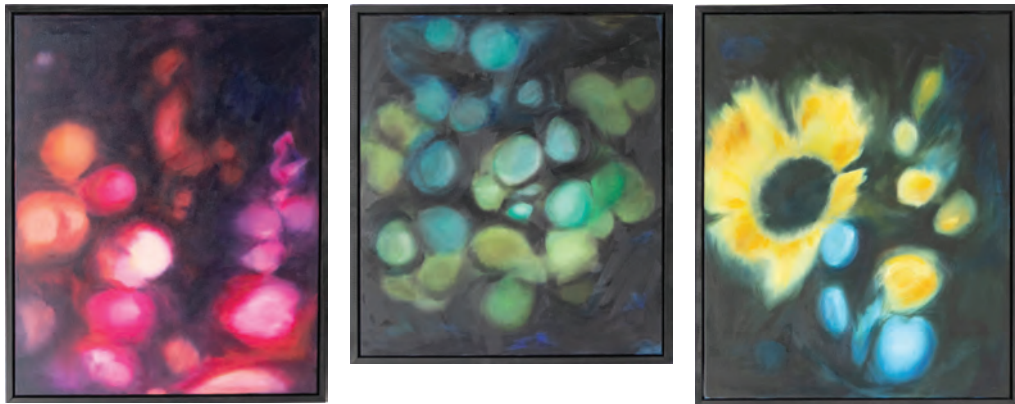


Figure 2. Final hang, SITE exhibition, Otago Polytechnic Dunedin School of Art, November 2022.

CONCLUSION

Sometimes, when you squint hard enough or you plunge into shadow after being in bright light, the world becomes blurry, loses its sharp edges and complicated lines. In its place is a collection of images radiating warmth and darkness. It is this feeling, this emotional response to these elements of the living environment, that my work embodies.

But a strong practice is not the only thing to have come out of three years of being immersed in a world that encourages and feeds creative souls. There is also knowledge, understanding, seeing, feeling and doing and, even though my formal study is over, it feels like I have only just begun.

Belinda Mason graduated with a BVA from Otago Polytechnic Dunedin School of Art in 2023, majoring in painting. She lives and works from her studio at home in Balclutha, South Otago. Belinda says: "My work is based in my love of plants and flowers and finding new ways to express this in colour and light. Strongly influenced by the Impressionists, my work also relates to bokeh photography due to its soft and blurred nature. After years of exploring pastel and watercolour, I am now working in oils on canvas, drawn to the creamy textures and the ability of oils to be moved around the surface. This has allowed me to lose the sharp edges and complicated lines of realism, and in its place leave an impression of the subject that glows in the shadows."

I Michael Greaves, "Belinda Mason: First Light" (exhibition text), Wave Project Space, Otepoti: Dunedin, January 2023.

INCANDESCENT MOLECULES

Linda Cook

What you want is an experience of making something that you haven't seen before.

Philip Guston¹

This essay offers insight into my Master of Fine Art project, which I completed at the Dunedin School of Art at Otago Polytechnic. My inquiry centred on paint: why does paint continue to fascinate and captivate? To answer this, I needed to untangle painting, abstraction and new materialism. My relationship with paint runs deep; I need to paint. Even when there is no foreseeable end goal or project conclusion, the discipline of working in studio keeps my mind and body well. For me, this does not mean mimesis, the replicating or copying of things; rather, I yearn to be completely immersed in oily, viscous colour. Getting my hands and eyes involved with raw matter is stimulating. As the body and eye engage, my awareness of the opportunities existing within the various substances at my disposal increases.

Contemporary abstraction and paint does not necessitate 'understanding' or receiving a message; it is fine if the viewer is puzzled. My hope for work-viewer engagement is a connection beyond the purely decorative, one which arouses a physical response – a feeling that comes from the gut or throat when you see the work. I am satisfied if you pause and connect with the object in front of you.

So where do these feelings come from and how do we understand this phenomenon? Could they originate in primal arousal, a corporeal connection, or something beyond our intellect? Gregory Minissale, in *Rhythm in Art, Psychology and New Materialism*, discusses the maker's moments of immersion, "unthinking" and rhythm during the creative process, as if meditating with eyes wide open.² This period is often referred to as flow time,³ a period of being absorbed by the action of doing. Minissale references both Michael Fried and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi with regard to the losing of self and connecting with otherness. Minissale posits that as we relax cognitive control, matter and mind meet, and this opens the door for all elements on the table to have agency.



Figure 1. Linda Cook, *Incandescent Molecules*, 2022, mixed media, 600x490mm.

Following this time of intense immersion, I find it useful to detach and take time to walk away. Leaving the work to sit is one of the most valuable tools I have adopted as a painter; the work needs to have its own space and I need to detach from it. Like any relationship, as we separate, we appreciate each other more. On returning, I see more clearly what is needed. Sometimes the work is done and needs nothing more. At other times, it needs a longer period of reflection.

I began this project working by distance in Te Tai Tokerau. Moving to Ōtepoti with my whanau in 2020 meant that I could explore new materials and surfaces and not be restricted by freight. I started to consider the durability of aluminium and builders' products. Some satisfactory textures emerged but there was, for me, a lack of love. It was through COVID lockdown that I found my raw material.

Locked out of studio and stuck for materials, I found the supermarket to be a source of copious quantities of free cardboard. I had virtually nothing else to work with and so began trialling, prepping and painting on discarded packaging. Constructing the porous surface was a challenge and seemed to take forever. There were times when I began to wonder why I had put myself through this. Cutting, sealing, gessoing and bracing ... it just went on. Although I had set myself a difficult task, I found the whole process of working with stubborn, obstinate cardboard far more pleasing than the rigid and industrial character of aluminium. Cardboard offered the potential of layering and constructing the surfaces, and I was excited by its malleable, chewy edge.

The challenge of constructing the sandwiched surfaces began to fascinate me, and became an obsession. Layering the cardboard in opposing directions added strength to the structure and helped counter any warping. I worked with found cardboard shapes, mixing them up and looking for awkward and unusual moments within the structure, finding pleasure in the unpredictable. I wanted my paintings to visually challenge, and sought un-pretty relationships, the clumsy, squanky and confronting. Due to the investigative nature of the making process, several factors required consideration: surface, fluid colour; fillers, detritus. Sensitivity and awareness of the various elements grew as I became attuned to the materials, considered their ability to cooperate and began extending colour and tone by experimenting with reactive colours. There were moments when the materials began to coalesce, when the extraordinary clunkiness in the work became a matter of intrigue and pleasure. Herein lies the enjoyable part of the process. The various cardboard components and textures are juggled around until the combined layers become a cohesive unit or 'sandwich.' Once the construction is satisfactory, I can immerse myself in the painterly part of the process.

In *One Way to Skin a Cat* (Figure 2), the awkwardness and slippage of the boards is balanced by strong horizontal lines which pre-existed in the cardboard packaging, while a bold blue stripe up the centre delivers dynamism to the lumpy red field.

As the fundamental utilitarian materials cohabit, they emerge as novel objects, their role re-evaluated. This 'curatorial' process of repurposing and re-imagining is evident in *You Can Only Indulge in Conjecture* (Figure 3).



Figure 2. Linda Cook, *One Way to Skin a Cat*, 2021, mixed media, 1450x1200mm.



Figure 3. Linda Cook, *You Can Only Indulge in Conjecture*, 2022,
mixed media, 800x590mm.



Figure 4. Linda Cook, *It Gets in Through Your Eyes*, 2022, mixed media, 570x410mm.



Figure 5. Linda Cook, *Before I Was Born I Met You*, 2022, mixed media, 1200x1450mm.

Balancing colour, form and texture, *You Can Only Indulge in Conjecture* is the result of a thought process built upon new-materiality and neo-casualism.⁴ Neo-casualism is present in the elements of humour arising from the unrefined, quirky form of the piece. In the practice of painting, neo-casualism works with the unfinished or incomplete, the awkward and clumsy imperfections that result seen as pleasing elements in the work.⁵ In my making process I adopt the approach of new materialism which accepts that all matter, whether substance or object, has agency and presence: "The 'I' of new materialism is no longer the sovereign human subject, but is conceived of as a material-semiotic actor; an articulation that, according to Donna Haraway (1991) encompasses the human and the non-human, the social and physical, and the material and immaterial."⁶

After establishing the base layers, the paintings soon progress to embrace the awkward and asymmetric slippage of edges, clashing of complex colours and the slip-slop of viscous matter. At this point, I create a dense mixture of pulp, combining a variety of available substances such as hair, powder clays, plaster, glue and pigment. Once these are mixed, I succumb to the fleshy fluidity and corporeality of the pliable goop, to the abject bodily associations of the materials. As the work approaches completion, I try to retain the sensual presence of the materials so that it is apparent to the viewer.

In *It Gets in Through Your Eyes* (Figure 4) the pulp was rhythmically fashioned with a blade. *Before I Was Born I Met You* (Figure 5) has a more organic flow, as the pulpy goop was caressed, pushed and folded, the abject surface revealing the intensity of the human and non-human encounter in making.

Going big and moving beyond my favoured domestic-scale works was a real challenge with these materials. For instance, *Before I Was Born I Met You* required multiple strengthening bars sandwiched between the layers of cardboard, along with tri-sided square aluminium guttering glued to the back. The larger works proved to be a physical challenge; the seemingly simple act of moving the large-scale layers around, spreading and building the surface, took weeks of negotiation.

Getting lost in the relationship with the work is where the pleasure factor surfaces. In real time, in the space and place of working, I deliberately set aside self so as to find the work, waiting for it to reveal itself to me; here, I am able to physically connect with the viscous fluids and colours. As my senses are stimulated in the act of painting, I am absorbed by matter, rhythm and colour: Minissale explains this phenomenon in terms of external vibrations which stimulate the brain and the body so that "light literally enters the eye, and photoreceptors in the visual cortex turn these wavelengths of light energy into electrical signals and aggregates of sensation."⁷

There are times when I enter the studio with an idea of where a painting is heading, then suddenly I find myself led by the materials and a complete turnaround with the work occurs. Situating my practice within new materiality, or neuromateriality as Minissale calls it, acknowledges the political world of the actant.⁸ Jane Bennett writes that all the elements involved in the making process are agents or actants and that "all forces and flows (materialities) are or can become lively, affective and signalling."⁹ All matter has a vitality which flows through everything, eliciting cooperation from all the elements involved which thereby deliver a collaborative end product.

However, even in a democracy there are levels of power, participation, and influence; someone has to hold the steering wheel. Following the immersion phase, a time of withdrawal from the process is needed, to look and consider. I am thankful for my mobile phone, as this enables me to take photographs of the works in progress, which I then toy with, editing and changing aspects of colour, cropping or adding a layer.

Once a satisfactory result is achieved, I reconsider the work and attend to how it might engage the space around it. My intention is to set up relationships within and without the painted surfaces, and for the edges to come to the fore and break away from the central, pictorial focus. The edge of these paintings is not merely a frame, margin or sign of containment, but an essential active component. My intention with these works is to connect with the viewer in their present time, communicating with their sense of self and place, isolating and removing them from all other distractions.



Figure 6. Kazimir Malevich, *Black Square*, 1915, oil on linen, 795x795mm. Part of a section of Suprematist works by Malevich exhibited at the "0,10 Exhibition," Petrograd, 1915. Wikipedia Commons.



Figure 7. Linda Cook, *Remaining Adamantine*, 2022, mixed media, 880x860mm.

In September 2022, while sitting in Wave Project Space planning an exhibition, I became aware that there were more corners than walls around me. This 'white cube' was barely a cube, with right-angled structures invading and disrupting the straight walls. The space was quirky, filled with corners, some small, some large and most seemingly unnecessary. All rooms have corners and, much like the edge of a painting these, too, can be acknowledged and engaged as active forms. I began working with hinged diptychs to be hung in the many nooks and crannies of this space. In doing so, not only would my works draw attention to their own edges and margins, but they would pull the architectural corners into the centre of the room, as with *Remaining Adamantine* (2022, Figure 7).

Other painters have worked with corners; consider Russian artist Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1915, Figure 6), hung high in the corner of the Petrograd exhibition room as an icon. By contrast, *Remaining Adamantine* is hinged, it hugs the corner; this is where it belongs. I wondered why we don't typically put paintings in corners. By engaging the room and exemplifying the space, the physicality of the painting is evidenced as it enters the realm of the object.

Choosing to work in this way has brought with it a variety of challenges. Some viewers are preoccupied with the use of cardboard as a base material, unable to move beyond the raw elements, looking for assurance that the works will endure. The fact that the paintings were once cardboard seems to test their ability to accept the transition or metamorphosis of the work. This puzzles me, as we know that nothing endures.

My original intention was to untangle abstraction and materialism in painting. This inquiry has been built on theory and making; my understanding came about through immersion of mind and matter. Abstract painting may remain a mystery and beg the question: why does any of this exist? The finished works will stand for themselves; each viewer will form their own valid connection and interpretation.

Linda Cook holds a Master of Fine Arts (with distinction) from the Dunedin School of Art at Otago Polytechnic. She shares a studio with painter Anita DeSoto on Dowling Street in central Dunedin. She has exhibited throughout New Zealand and in England and is the recipient of several art awards. Having travelled extensively, Linda Cook now calls Dunedin home and lives in the city with her family and dog.

- 1 Michael Blackwood Productions, *Phillip Guston: A Life Lived 2k Remaster [Trailer]*, Youtube video, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pn1CmhMvoHA>.
- 2 Gregory Minissale, *Rhythm in Art, Psychology and New Materialism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 120-121.
- 3 Minissale, *Rhythm in Art*, citing Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1990), 109.
- 4 John Yau, *Thomas Nozkowski* (London: Lund Humphries, 2017).
- 5 Thomas Micchelli, "Painting on the Cusp: Abstraction of the 1980s," *Hyperallergic*, 6 July 2013, <https://hyperallergic.com/74885/painting-on-the-cusp-abstraction-of-the-1980s/>.
- 6 Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a 'New Materialism' through the Arts* (London: IB Taurus, 2013), 3.
- 7 Minissale, *Rhythm in Art*, 83.
- 8 Ibid, 12.
- 9 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 117.

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