

# SCOPE

*Contemporary Research Topics*

art & design 26:  
August 2024

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Contemporary Research Topics

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

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## TIME TRAVEL

Jane Venis

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Jane Venis** is multi-media artist, writer, and editor. Her arts practice focuses on the politics of contemporary popular culture expressed through the making of objects, video, sound, and performance works.

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

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



KIWA

Isaiah Okeroa

*Ko Taranaki te maunga.  
Ko Waitotoroa me Tangahoe ngā awa.  
Ko Kurahaupō me Aotea ngā waka.  
Ko Taranaki me Ngāti Ruanui ngā iwi.  
Ko Ngāti Moeahu me Hāpōtiki ngā hapū.  
Ko Parihaka me Taiporohēnui ngā Papakainga.  
Ko Isaiah Okeroa tōku ingoa.*

Kiwa embodies a journey of self-discovery and cultural revitalisation through mahi toi. As a takatāpui Māori navigating a conservative upbringing, this project explores my connection to Taranaki and Ngāti Ruanui while grappling with colonial and religious influences. Through mahi raranga, taonga pūoro and the moving image, *Kiwa* signifies a transformative process of reclaiming cultural identity and healing intergenerational disconnections. Drawing from indigenous methodologies like wānanga, this essay reflects on the impact of tikanga Māori in shaping personal and communal narratives, ultimately contributing to the preservation and revitalisation of Māori knowledge and practices.



*“Hokia ki tō maunga kia pūrea ai e koe ki ngā Hau o Tāwhirimātea.”  
– Return to your mountain to be cleansed by the winds of Tāwhirimātea.*

## HE URI AHAU NŌ TARANAKI ME NGĀTI RUANUI

### – I am a descendant of Taranaki and Ngāti Ruanui

Although I was born and raised in Waihōpai, Murihiku, I whakapapa to Taranaki and Ngāti Ruanui, located in the west of Te Ika-a-Māui in Aotearoa. As a takatāpui Māori growing up in a conservative context, who was mostly guided by Catholic faith and values, it was challenging for me when it came to exploring the multiple aspects of my identity. My cultural heritage differed from my personal beliefs, which meant that it was easy to allow the cultural identity of my whanau to fade behind colonial and religious scaffolding. Tertiary study has helped me address my generational disconnect to Te Ao Māori and has allowed me to find solace within my art practice. I believe my mahi toi is a pathway for self-discovery and healing.

During my upbringing, art in any form has been a remedial outlet; I have always had a strong relationship with my creative instincts. This connection comes from observing how my mother would apply her creative and artistic abilities to any aspect of our lives. As we moved around a lot in Waihōpai, I was always surrounded by sculptural elements and forms in our whare, ranging from tribal masks to impressive copies of Goldie paintings. My mother would express her relationship with Māoritanga through the art she would select for our home. This made me realise that art has a way of visually representing and reflecting our values, beliefs and cultural connections. Through her actions, my mother created a meaningful domestic environment, allowing art to be the sole space of expression for our cultural identity, especially in a context where ancestral links were absent.

*Kiwa* incorporates Te Ao Māori elements such as tikanga, mahi raranga and taonga pūoro. Together, these components expand, elaborate and visually demonstrate the emotions and thoughts that fuel this journey. My engagement with these elements has allowed me to further investigate and interpret my cultural identity through a meaningful dialogue and thus contribute to wider cultural revitalisation. Thus I am building on the foundation that my mother established in my youth.

## TE WHĀINGA O TE AO TIKANGA

### – The purpose of Te Ao Tikanga

Reconnecting with my cultural identity is an ongoing and lifelong journey. *Kiwa* has been instrumental in revealing that my most profound understanding of my whakapapa and Māoritanga occurs through creative processes and active participation within the Māori community. Therefore, my contribution to the revitalisation of Te Ao Māori is through mahi toi, guided by tikanga.

Taking the course, Toi Maruata Level 3, through Te Wānanga o Aotearoa has been a fulfilling experience and has been the backbone of my research process. Toi Maruata is an introductory level course where taira learn the many modes of mahi toi such as whakairo, mahi raranga, mahi rongoa, waiata, kowhaiwhai patterns and peita kiriaku, while following tikanga and kawa.

Entering and navigating Te Ao Māori spaces through the indigenous methodology of wānanga has provided an immersive practice. Wānanga is a space that encourages the transmission and construction of Mātauranga Māori through the use of whakapapa performance, pōwhiri, waiata, karakia, whakataukī, kai, pūrākau and relationship building. It is in the space of wānanga that the genius of tupuna Māori is nourished and shared as a collective.

In their article “Wānanga as a Research Methodology,” Nēpia Mahuika and Rangimārie Mahuika describe wānanga as a culturally grounded research methodology that positions the needs, priorities and knowledge base of Te Ao Māori. This method aligns with the core value of wānanga, which strives to empower and support the collective production of knowledge; it also disrupts and decolonises traditional Western research methods by centering Mātauranga Māori. “*Wānanga provides a unique methodological framework for the regulation and governance of collective*

knowledge construction, maintenance, and decision making.”<sup>1</sup> This approach to research methodology requires a focus on knowledge translation, going against the Western paradigm of generating knowledge only for academic or intellectual purposes. This is achieved “[b]y positioning the collective production of knowledge as central, including knowledge translation, rather than just relying on research outputs and a repositioning of researcher/researched relationships.”<sup>2</sup> This approach also allows the knowledge gained to be applied practically, in ways that benefit the community, ensuring that the research outcomes are accessible, meaningful and useful.

Through my course, Toi Maruata, every aspect of my hinengaro was stimulated as the result of being encouraged to enter a state of deep thought and reflection. Toi Maruata cultivates an atmosphere that encourages participants to express themselves and share their thoughts and perspectives without the fear of being judged or rejected. This sense of safety promotes a sense of unity and inclusivity, which aids participants in fully engaging with their cultural heritage, deepening their understanding and harnessing a rich sense of connection to Māori culture.

Through immersing myself in wānanga, I have been able to draw on the wisdom, experiences and techniques of my kaiako, classmates and tupuna, gifts which I could only receive kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) and which are valid and credible because of the transmission of knowledge. Direct personal interaction and connection is highly valued by Māori and contributes to the authenticity and legitimacy of the Mātauranga being passed down. “At a wānanga level, we can take the courageous space to not depend on the approval of established thought alone ... This recognises that in some quarters this work is counter-hegemonic and counter scholarship.”<sup>3</sup> In a Te Ao Māori worldview, wānanga can range from the formal classroom setting to a relaxed one-on-one interaction; it is about uniting and passing on knowledge in a non-transactional way. It is about acknowledging information as taonga, and as something we earn instead of something we have a right to. Grounding my research in wānanga spaces allowed me to listen, respond and share my experiences. These moments of transmission confirmed the validity in my lived experiences; being born and raised away from my tūrangawaewae is a valid way of existing as a Tangata Māori. Through wānanga, the coming together of many forms and walks of life reinforces the culturally grounded pedagogies that coordinate with our ways of knowing and being in the world.

## KEI TE WAENGANUI AU I TE PŪ HARAKEKE

### – I am between piles of harakeke

Kiwa is enriched by sacred boundaries known as tapu. “Thinking about whakapapa, it is fundamental that we remember where we came from. Thinking of Tapu is how we preserve our bodily and mental autonomy – our sacredness – [and] means we adapt to where we are now.”<sup>4</sup> I understand that my tinana is tapu, and in today’s society it is imperative to carefully maintain the sacredness of my wairua and cultural identity.

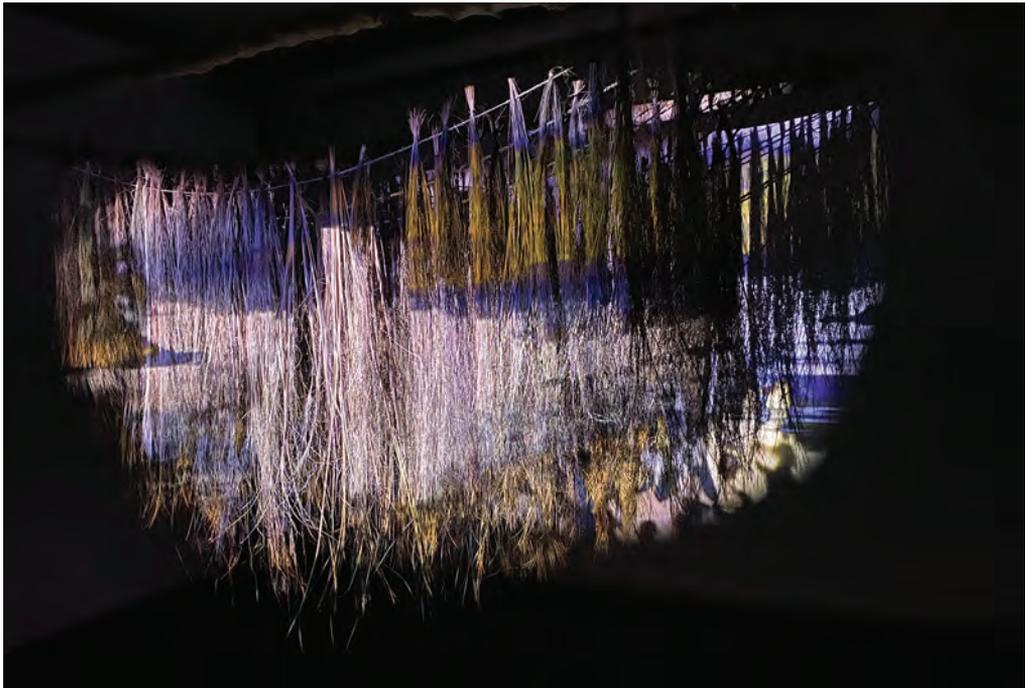
This project delves into the sacred principles of tikanga Māori concerning the harvesting and preparation of harakeke, (New Zealand flax) and explores how this process mirrors my personal journey of self-discovery. In a tangible form, Kiwa embodies these concepts through the creation of a handmade structure resembling a drying rack. This structure, measuring around three metres in length, is crafted from driftwood and bound together with taura harakeke (flax rope). Additionally, harakeke rau (flax leaves/ blades) are meticulously processed, including stripping, shredding, boiling, dyeing and bundling, before being suspended from the drying frame as they dry. This method of boiling the harakeke and letting it dry preserves the whenu (strands) for future use. The whenu can be stored away for a long time and, once re-hydrated, they can be woven again.

The traditional Māori art of weaving harakeke and other natural fibres serves as a means to connect with my tupuna and cultural heritage. The process of harvesting from the land and preparing the harakeke to be woven establishes a direct link to the whenua and Te Taiao: this practice reinforces the reciprocal relationship that Māori have with the environment. Mahi raranga allows me to tap into the genius of tupuna Māori and continue their legacy into the future, and therefore allows me to uphold and preserve tikanga Māori.



In her PhD thesis, Donna Campbell (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Ruanui), a Waikato-based weaving artist, explores theories based on kaupapa Māori and mana wāhine that are organic to Aotearoa, descending from Papatūānuku and Ranginui. Campbell evaluates these theories together with notions of raranga and whatu and how, together, they enable a cultural transformation. “*Mātauranga Māori is reflected and drawn upon in a transformative relationship, one that transforms the experience of the maker as much as the maker transforms the materials.*”<sup>15</sup> The physical processing of flax under the guidance of tikanga as protection serves as a continuation of this ancient practice. When the maker is actively present and engaging with mahi raranga, this transformative power extends beyond the tangible final result – it resides in the process. The process is the whole point; it is what I take away from the project instead of the outcome. This has been my mindset when progressing through this project. Gathering Mātauranga that serves a purpose for the soul and is then visually translated through my mahi – harvesting and preparation to drying – reflects my self-exploratory journey. The bundled harakeke remains suspended in a transitional state, eagerly awaiting the next stage of being woven together. This process reminds me of how it feels to be disconnected from Taranaki, longing to be reconnected with my whenua and learn the stories of my tipuna, yearning to weave myself, my memories, my experiences within the soil of my turangawaewae. I am responsible for advancing the harakeke through each preparation phase and through this interaction, the mauri within both the harakeke and myself are activated, intricately, intertwining and weaving together our shared essence of life.

Mahi raranga represents a reciprocal exchange of mauri, and the interaction between harakeke and myself is a deep-seated hononga (connection) rooted in our shared whakapapa. In *Kiwa*, the focus is placed on the domestic activity that precedes the weaving of harakeke. Campbell also emphasises how the theoretical praxis of Kaupapa Māori is embedded in Māori culture and philosophical traditions and how Māori research affirms our cultural ways: “*The plant is dormant in the winter, until the spring when the putiputi flower attracts the Tui, then the renewal cycle begins. Kaupapa Māori theories and methodologies make provision for a nonlinear approach, such as the lifestyle of the harakeke plant, to the research.*”<sup>16</sup>



Using the analogy of the life cycle of the harakeke plant responding to its environment, I understand that Kaupapa Māori embraces a fluid research process that recognises nonlinear approaches. Engaging with the materials, while keeping an open mind, allows access to new ideas that arise through physical 'doing' in response to my environment, a natural process of creation and research. While being in the present, connected to the past and creating taonga for the future, the harakeke screen is permeated with my present realities. The screen integrates the past, present and future into a palpable form of expression. It is a testament to my journey of self-discovery and cultural exploration, and carries the mauri of personal growth, acknowledgment of my tupuna and aspirations for the future.

Tikanga Māori provides me with a framework for handling harakeke, from plant to whenu to woven, guided by principles such as manaakitanga (hospitality and kindness), kaitiakitanga (guardianship) and whanaungatanga (relationship building), all rooted in preserving Mātauranga Māori. All the harakeke used in the project has been sourced from significant places and gifted by whānau and friends, enhancing the project's mauri through communal involvement and contributions. Navigating this project without compromising my personal tikanga was challenging, specifically when it came to collecting natural resources, especially because I have no ancestral links to the environment around me. Often, my intuition played a crucial role, guiding my decision-making process when collecting materials from specific areas.

For example, while looking for driftwood, I initially searched Brighton beach in Dunedin, a reputed hub for driftwood. However, I found nothing after hours of searching, until I stumbled on four long, slender pieces positioned near an entrance to the beach in a way that seemed intentional. This is when my inner voice came into play, initiating an internal conflict about whether to retrieve the wood. While it would have been easy to take the wood, it didn't feel right and because of this, it would have disrupted the mauri of the project with an unsettling energy. It wasn't worth compromising my tikanga or the mauri of *Kiwa* just to fulfil a task and check it off the list. On the same day, a dear friend, Jennifer Cattermole, informed me about an abundance of driftwood that had washed up at the end of Portsmouth Drive in South Dunedin, right across from the Rongo Memorial rock, which commemorates the imprisonment of political prisoners from Parihaka. I strongly believe that there were powers beyond my control at work in this instance and that it was a tohu (sign) from Atua Māori, if not my Tipuna, guiding me back to Rongo as a clear passage to my Taranaki whakapapa. These events made it emotionally significant to gather the wood I needed.

## TE IRIRANGI O TAONGA PŪORO

### – The spirit voice of taonga pūoro

Combined with found/field recordings, traditional Māori instruments, taonga pūoro, construct the soundscape of *Kiwa*. The incorporation of taonga pūoro in a compositional context serves as a means to stimulate multiple senses and to evoke emotional responses, nostalgic memories, reverence and awe. The use of traditional instruments mixed with contemporary found sound enriches the auditory aspect of *Kiwa* and adds a layer of cultural authenticity and spiritual significance. The purpose of the soundscape is to communicate and celebrate my journey of reconnecting to Māoritanga, and therefore enhances the transformative experience, inviting myself and the listener to travel through time, space and cultural landscapes and ultimately inviting us to reconnect to Te Taiao and the ancestral realm. The soundscape serves as a whakatau for the space, settling the mauri of the project as well as lifting the veil between the living and the dead, further enforcing the tapu boundaries that *Kiwa* embraces.

Carrying the values of wānanga, mahi raranga and tikanga, the process of creating my taonga pūoro instruments is just as valuable as their final form. Like the art of weaving, I only work with native natural materials such as rimu, kauri, hue (gourds), native bird feathers (ethically sourced), rocks, pounamu and muka, figuring out how different forms produce different sounds, as every taonga pūoro instrument has an individual voice. During 2023 I attended a taonga pūoro group wānanga hosted by Jennifer Cattermole at the University of Otago's music department. Through these wānanga sessions, Cattermole offers a unique opportunity to observe and learn from her extraordinary taonga pūoro collection. *"Learning from live demonstrators has, in my experience, been very effective as a teaching-learning*



method. I'd try to impart what I knew about various playing techniques to the rest of the group by verbally describing and modelling them."<sup>7</sup> These sessions allow all participants to learn the histories, purpose and symbolism of taonga pūoro, as well as how to play these instruments. This up-close interaction with the instruments informed me of their construction procedure, from how the kōauau has been hollowed out to the cord binding of the pūkaea or pūtōrino. Having this special access to these instruments helped my research process astronomically. Cattermole also taught us the correspondence between the instruments and the natural world and how interconnected this relationship is, from using the shapes of oceanic waves to the indescribable noises of the ngahere, all harnessed for taonga pūoro to respond to.

In his master's thesis, taonga pūoro practitioner Rob Thorne (Ngāti Tumutumu) describes the traditional methods of making kōauau rākau by experimenting with different ways of hole-making. *"The rationale for reconstruction and re-enactment as valid research methods is defined and emphasised by the importance and relevance of these techniques as vital to revitalisation."*<sup>8</sup> Thorne's research, filling in the information gaps that have been lost or eroded over time, encouraged this project to follow in his footsteps; through the making and playing of my instruments, I am contributing to revitalising cultural practices and to preserving cultural knowledge. *"As the work progressed, I gained a greater understanding of myself culturally, while the learning and application of practical traditional skills unlocked connections from out of the past that empowered newly discovered strategies for how I might exist as a Māori in a modern world."*<sup>9</sup> These techniques play a significant role in accommodating a sense of identity and challenging dominant hegemonic narratives. In his conclusion, Thorne notes that the sound is the passage for the viewer's immersion into the work being performed and is a bridge to help navigate and carry them through the performance.

I have collected recordings of my closest friends singing harmonies, embedding their voices in the soundscape in order to enrich the communal mauri of *Kiwa*. The mixture and involvement of field recordings ranging from bird calls, crashing ocean waves and whistling whanau members to random candid recordings, along with structured vocal harmonies, constructs a dissonance in the soundscape, further reinforcing the theme of disconnection in *Kiwa*. This un-melodious element aligns with the fluidity of tikanga Māori insofar as it rejects static Western systems of music and embraces flexible shifts of sound, allowing the space to be open to change and adaptation.

## THE MOVING IMAGE

### "Ka mua, Ka muri"

#### – Walking backwards into the future

The moving image serves as a platform that continues the teachings and values of mahi raranga and taonga pūoro into the contemporary future, bridging the gap between traditional practices and the present day. The moving image, used as a medium to convey storytelling through the non-absolute lens, allows the viewer to insert their own experiences and perspectives into the work's narrative through visual prompts. *Kiwa* recognises the contribution of moving images to the movement and fluidity of tikanga Māori. Nonetheless, the use of digital media should be treated with sensitivity when assimilated into a tikanga Māori space or context. Understanding the original narratives, values and protocols associated with the taonga is crucial to ensure that their representation in the moving image remains aligned with the principles of Te Ao Māori. Tikanga is meant to adapt and evolve along with the changing needs and circumstances of Māori. It is deeply rooted in tradition and ancestral knowledge – it is not a static set of rules or practices.

The topic of the Māori moving image has been less well documented than the Te Ao Māori practices discussed above. *"Over the last forty years, Māori artists have utilised moving image to centre complex ideas, lived experiences, and radical hope."*<sup>10</sup> With the advancement of technology since the 1980s, the moving image urges Māori artists to push its boundaries. *"The ability to record motion and time is at the heart of moving image. This capacity to explore a time/space continuum applies to Māori aspherical notions of time, starting from the centre and moving in any direction."*<sup>11</sup> The technology of projection and film engages with my materials and extends their materiality into new possibilities for



interpretation and storytelling. "Digital media celebrates material culture in an abstract way where the mauri or life force of the taonga exists but is no longer bound by the original narratives."<sup>12</sup> Digital media allows for the representation and exploration of material culture in a non-physical and abstract manner. It can display the taonga by capturing the essence and significance beyond its physical form. By liberating the mauri of taonga from the constraints of specific narratives, digital media opens up discourse and pathways for reinterpretation and reimagining, pathways which ultimately lift the work into new avenues and narratives.

The moving imagery that composes the visuals of *Kiwa* includes footage filmed in Waihōpai, featuring my mother and sister, as well as myself, captured during both staged and candid moments. These clips range from footage of me performing in a Victorian-style skirt I crafted during my second year of study to a segment from the screen used in my work *Katarina*, worn as a cloak in different locations. Additionally, there's footage of my family wearing some of the same attire, as well as moments capturing them amid their day-to-day activities. Together, these elements weave a visual narrative unique to my whanau and me, evoking our fragmented connection to our Māoritanga. The filming process brought to light the disconnect I observed within my family's daily life in Waihōpai, trapped in an unending cycle or hamster wheel that obstructs avenues for cultural rejuvenation or change. This is a significant factor contributing to our disconnection from Taranaki and Te Ao Māori. This project has revealed many layers of understanding of my mother's relationship with her Māoritanga, further reinforcing my commitment to cultural reconnection so that, one day, I will be able to encourage or help my whanau with their journey.

When my grandfather was young, he fled Taranaki and moved down south to work. Growing up, this was a super-sensitive topic that we never discussed. My whanau knew practically nothing of my grandad's upbringing and had to piece it together over the years of his life; even today we are still piecing it together. My grandad's pain associated with Taranaki has impacted my whanau's sense of cultural identity. All of us have responded differently to the ripple effect created, sparking divergent priorities. This phenomenon is very common in Māori communities, and can be summed up in a single word: urbanisation – the relocation of Māori from tribal areas to urban centres. This movement has diminished the value of iwi, hapu and whanau, resulting in 'the tribe' no longer being the sole focal point of Māori identity.<sup>13</sup>

Māori have not yet been fully able to adapt to these changes. In my experience, this has led to whanau forming their own understanding of tikanga unique to their where/space, understandings which could differ from their hapu tikanga and or their iwi tikanga. Undertaking *Kiwa* has enabled me to recognise that the tikanga my whanau practices is flexible, even disjointed. Despite this disconnection, the way we express our Māoritanga is distinctively our own. *Kiwa* demonstrates the validity and authenticity of this cultural representation by revealing our individual responses to Te Taiao, taonga pūoro, mahi raranga and, more broadly, Te Ao Māori. This project celebrates the differences in my whanau and comprises all of our stories, brought together through a visual language. *Kiwa* opens the portal and connects me to tupuna Māori, deepening my understanding of my cultural identity as well as Māori culture. I believe my work expresses the importance of self-expression and self-healing and contributes to the transmission of Mātauranga Māori.

*Kiwa* is a testament to my great-grandfather, Kiwa Okeroa, and is dedicated to my niece, Kiwa Bates.

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# JIANZHI: A SILHOUETTE OF TRADITION, ART AND FEMINISM THROUGH CHINESE PAPER CUTTING

Eva Ding

My work examines gender inequality issues affecting Chinese women. By integrating Chinese folk paper-cut art into sculptural works, I seek to reinterpret traditional themes and stimulate discussion about gendered social phenomena portrayed in Chinese women's folk art and fine art, thereby fostering consideration of some specific feminist issues and their potential implementation within the Chinese context.

## MY GRANDMOTHER'S PRESENCE

In the quietude of my early memories, my grandmother's presence is a constant, defined by her methodical ways and a dignity that seemed innate to her. She had an evening ritual of folding her trousers with care, placing them under her pillow to ensure they would be smooth and ready for the next day. She made her own clothes, convinced that nothing bought could match the fit of something tailored by her own hands. Her feet, marked by the remnants of a bygone era's practices, bore witness to history's scars, yet she moved through life with a resilience as quiet as it was strong. Being educated was rare for women of her time and place. Yet, my grandmother's narratives hinted at a family history shaped by the shifting fortunes of China during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a story of prosperity and loss. Her lessons on virtues and morals were more like gentle reminders than strict rules. These wise sayings, rooted in a life that had spanned wars and societal upheavals, were her way of passing on a legacy of resilience and understanding.

Raised under her guidance, I appreciate the privilege of being tethered to my cultural roots, allowing me to explore various interests ranging from calligraphy and sewing, to ink painting and cooking, each skill a chapter drawn from my heritage, yet adapted to my own journey. Some Chinese traditions, like paper cutting, were not found in my family's narrative and my grandmother's teachings – a reminder of the regional selectivity with which cultural practices are passed down, shaping our connection to the past in unique ways.

## *Jianzhi*

Paper-cut art, known as *jianzhi*, is a quintessential and enduring folk art form in China. Its historical origins date back to the Tang Dynasty (6th –7th century AD); over time, it has permeated people's lives across diverse regions. This traditional art form encapsulates a rich background of social consciousness, moral values, practical wisdom, life philosophies and aesthetic sensibilities that resonate with most Chinese people. It has exerted a profound influence on the culture's visual languages, shaping the creation of decorations for festive celebrations, the intricate carving of leather shadow puppets, the adornment of porcelain patterns, the design of printed fabric motifs, the embellishment of furniture, architectural aesthetics, and even the production of modern and contemporary animations.

Paper-cut art has historically been called "women's art" within Chinese folk culture, owing to its suitability as an activity for rural women during their leisure hours. In traditional society, paper-cutting was a mandatory skill passed down through generations of women, with young girls commencing their training and skill development under the guidance of their mothers and grandmothers from an early age. After years of dedicated practice, they would attain the status of skilled paper-cutting women, a qualification often associated with readiness for marriage.

Society emphasised a woman's proficiency in *nvhong*, a term encompassing various labour-intensive activities traditionally performed by women, including sewing, embroidery, weaving and paper-cutting. Traditional norms and values determined a woman's standing as an accomplished daughter-in-law, possessing appropriate skills, or as an inept wife with less refined abilities, a judgment encompassing her proficiency in paper-cutting and other *nvhong* skills.

In the context of traditional patriarchal China, the gender status of women stood in stark inequality to that of men, despite the reality that women were closely associated with men within the family unit and the broader societal framework. The assessment and acknowledgement of women's worth were invariably contingent upon the judgment and recognition of a male-dominated society, highlighting deeply entrenched disparities in gender roles and status.

Throughout Chinese art history, large-scale portraiture has traditionally been absent – in stark contrast to the cultural context of traditional Western art that developed from the ancient Greek city-state system and its approach to expressing the human body. However, folk art, such as paper-cutting art, sometimes serves as an exception in this respect. Although portraiture is a significant aspect of paper-cut art, the leading creators of the genre – women – have typically preferred to substitute direct representations of female bodies and sexuality with metaphors, symbolism and homophones in order to convey hidden meanings.

Figure 2 features a traditional paper-cut artwork from northern Shaanxi called *Eagle Stepping on Rabbit*. In traditional Chinese Chinese folk culture, birds serve as symbols of masculinity, often used as metaphors for men, while rabbits symbolise femininity, representing women. Moreover, 'rabbit' in Chinese (*tuzi*) is homophonic, also meaning "spit out children," a phrase symbolising fertility. Consequently, this artwork has become a metaphor for sexual intercourse. However, rather than depicting a pleasurable experience of mutual love, the paper cut emphasises the oppressive and coercive aspect of the male–female reproductive process, highlighting the stark disparities in gender status.

Similar implications are found in other traditional paper-cut works, such as *Fish Playing with Lotus*, which is commonly used as a decorative pattern for wedding celebrations and which "not only mimics the shapes of fish and lotus to suggest heterosexual union but taps the power of fertility from fish to suggest the unspoken desire for human reproduction."<sup>11</sup> *Snake Coiling Around Rabbit* and *Phoenix Playing with Peonies* express similar themes related to sexual activities between men and women.



Figure 1. Yuhuan Women Paper-cutting, Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yuhuan\\_Paper-cutting.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yuhuan_Paper-cutting.jpg)



Figure 2. *Eagle Stepping on a Rabbit* by Cao Dianxiang from Ansai, Shaanxi Province Paper-cutting, 23×33cm, Collection of the National Art Museum of China. <https://www.namoc.org/zgmsg/xw2023/202301/767b82339ccc4911b5e843c7d8da916a.shtml>



Figure 3 shows three renditions of the theme “snake coiling around rabbit.” The figure on the left and the one below use the monochrome cut-out technique, while the one at upper right uses the monochromatic folding cut. In the natural world, snakes and rabbits are inherently unequal in size. Rabbits have a relatively uniform size, while snakes exhibit a variety of forms. The image on the left depicts a snake (masculinity) and a rabbit (femininity) of roughly equivalent size. The snake’s tail coils within the rabbit’s body, and at the centre of this circular composition lies the Chinese character *Xi*, symbolising traditional wedding celebrations. The animals’ heads are touching. The snake extends its tongue to gently touch the rabbit’s cheek, while the rabbit gazes back with slightly open eyes. This paper cut is a customary motif in traditional wedding celebrations, which employ images of snakes and rabbits as a metaphorical way of wishing the newlyweds a joyful wedding night.



Figure 3. Unknown artists, depictions of Snake coiling around Rabbit. <https://www.nipic.com/show/16281636.html>

In contrast to the tender portrayal of sexuality between the snake and rabbit in the left-hand picture, the two works on the right reveal gender inequality in their underlying message. The image at bottom right positions the snake at the centre of the composition, asserting an absolute dominance. In this instance, a colossal python has ensnared two rabbits, one on the left and the other on the right. The rabbits are not interacting with the snake; instead, they face away from each other. This reflects the reality of many traditional feudal societies, where men could marry multiple wives to maximise reproduction, leading to competition among wives to secure the favour of the male figure.

The image at upper right, employing the technique of folded paper-cutting, is equally intriguing, with its symmetrical composition. In this depiction, the snake takes on some of the attributes of the traditional dragon motif. These sturdy serpents, enveloped by rising clouds, symbolise aspirations for male prosperity and success as indicators of social status. In stark contrast, the tiny rabbits appear as mere decorative elements attached to the snake’s body, seemingly trapped within the design’s inner space. Again, this portrayal reflects a traditional feudal society where women were typically relegated to invisibility within the confines of their homes by men. Once a woman was married, she was regarded as an integral part of her husband’s possessions and was not recognised independently of him.

The distinctions among these three images, all dating to the late twentieth century, are readily apparent. As cut-out depictions of a gendered social phenomenon, each serves as a direct manifestation of the creator’s inner subjective expression and attitudes. However, the art of paper-cutting, which as we have seen occupies a pivotal role in women’s lives, has undergone some significant changes that reflect women’s efforts to gain acknowledgement in Chinese society. An online search reveals numerous versions of the same themes in contemporary paper cuts; they typically lack precise documentation (including the artists’ names) and comprehensive information, reflecting the ongoing invisibility of these female folk artists.

Figure 4. Wang Ximeng, *One Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains*, Song dynasty, 1113, ink and colour on silk scroll. Palace Museum, Beijing, China. Detail of original. Complete scroll is 51.3x1191.5cm.



Historically, paper cutting went beyond the realm of folk arts. Within the confines of traditional Confucian education, the acquisition of painting skills constituted one of the four essential proficiencies sought by upper-class women. These four skills encompassed mastery in painting, competence in playing the *guqin* (zither), proficiency at chess and practising calligraphy. Nevertheless, in antiquity, attaining recognition as a female painter was a near-impossible feat. Women were confined to painting trees and flowers, a thematic choice intended to symbolise their inherent femininity. The portrayal of grand landscapes (as in *shan-shui* painting) featuring majestic mountains and rivers, symbolic of power and territorial authority, remained a privilege reserved exclusively for men within patriarchal societies, where dominion and control were firmly ensconced as male prerogatives.

## AWAKENING AND AUTONOMY

Jia Fang-zhou (1940–), regarded as one of the pioneering contemporary art critics in China, with a dedicated focus on feminist art, has diligently championed the recognition and advancement of contemporary women artists. In his view, the ascent of women's art is a subject that cannot be avoided in China. However, he also acknowledges the formidable challenges inherent in the struggles of female artists as they confront a deeply entrenched patriarchal cultural paradigm. Notably, despite its significance, he contends that such a movement does not directly threaten mainstream culture. Given the categorisation of women as a "vulnerable group," their quest for enhanced status and collective dignity necessitates an ongoing, individualised empowerment effort, implying (as I understand it) that the awakening and autonomy of each individual (female) are prerequisites for forming a higher collective consciousness.

Jia divides the developmental trajectory of Chinese contemporary women artists into three distinct stages. The initial phase, which he calls the "pre-feminist art" stage, is defined by a self-oppressing attitude, whereby women artists typically refrain from divulging or articulating their innermost sentiments and personal encounters in their work. In the subsequent phase, the "self-exploration" stage, female artists embark on a journey of self-discovery, using their works as a medium of self-expression by exploring their individual experiences in them. The third and final phase, the "greater self" stage, transcends personal boundaries to encompass broader societal and historical dimensions. In this phase, artists reflect on the human condition and social dynamics, channelling their concern for women as a collective into their creative journeys.<sup>2</sup>

If, for Chinese female artists, the first stage was limited to painting mundane subjects like flowers and plants and suppressing their inner expression, the second stage began as part of the New Culture Movement in the Republican era during the early twentieth century. In response to the infusion of Western ideologies that permeated this movement, China dispatched numerous talented young artists abroad to assimilate Western oil painting techniques. Among them was Pan Yuliang (1895–1977), a painter who pursued her studies in Paris; in her self-portraits, she adeptly interwove her distinct identity as a Chinese woman adorned in a qipao with the vibrant backdrop of Western modernity. She intended to bridge the gap between traditional Chinese aesthetics and the contemporary Western milieu. Pan's art developed amid the complex interplay of conflicting dichotomies that played out between West and East, tradition and modernity, male chauvinism and emerging feminism.<sup>3</sup> Through her portrayal of the female body, (for example *Narcissism*, of 1929, Anhui Museum, Hefei.) Pan ventured fearlessly into uncharted art territories in China, imbuing her female portraiture with a new expression of individual consciousness. Pan's work marks a pivotal juncture in the evolution of Chinese women artists.

Once women attempted to use their personal experience and "women's perspective" to interpret the twentieth century, their work differed not only from that of male artists, but also from the work of women artists of any former era. Thus, this new approach came to define women's art, and these concepts increasingly came to form the themes and content of "women's art" and its "post-modern" overtones.<sup>4</sup>

Women's art in China underwent a significant transformation when it shifted its focus to self-awareness, imbuing the discipline with genuine creative significance. It was during the 1990s that Chinese women's art emerged from the shadows and experienced a remarkable surge, marked by an emphasis on the pursuit of equal rights to discourse

within China's socio-political milieu, the affirmation of individual self-identity and the candid expression of female sexuality. Chinese women artists had finally gained visibility. Numerous female artists turned to examining attitudes towards Chinese women and female artists. They addressed contemporary feminist issues in China through diverse media including painting, photography, sculpture, conceptual art and performance art.

As a post-doctoral researcher with the Tate Research Centre: Asia in 2013 – 2014,<sup>5</sup> Monica Merlin interviewed Chinese women artists to discuss the intricate dynamics of feminist practice in Chinese contemporary art, such as Tao Aimin and her work *River of Women*, 2005, in the Tate collection. It is important to note that China's socio-cultural landscape diverges significantly from Western societies' and feminist movements. In China, the pervasive influence of traditional patriarchal culture shapes female artists' personal experiences as well as their aspirations for women's rights and equal status. Female Chinese artists approach women's issues through a distinctly Chinese lens rather than adhering strictly to Western ideological 'isms' and feminist methodologies. This perspective is often characterised in the West as a "compromised" stance on freedom and rights, a charge that to some extent reflects the nuanced and multifaceted nature of these artists' engagement with gender-related issues in the Chinese context.<sup>6</sup>

Myriad women's issues permeate contemporary Chinese society. These include the neglect of female gender identity; the objectification of women; the assignment of women's value based on male perspectives; the perpetuation of traditional stereotypes of femininity and sexuality (often propagated through both traditional thinking and "Chinternet" online platforms); complexities arising in intergenerational relationships; gender inequalities persisting within both family and society; the under-representation and limited acknowledgement of women and female artists; and the absence of understanding and safeguarding of feminist groups within contemporary culture. These multifaceted issues demand serious consideration and action as, in the words of Monica Merlin, "all the contributions converge on avoiding reducing gender to one single concept while pointing at the complexity and fluidity of a wide set of notions which intersect it."<sup>7</sup>

## SILHOUETTES OF CHINESE SOCIETY

The phenomenon of gender objectification in traditional paper-cutting arts, where male and female figures are metaphorically transformed into animals or plants – the imagery of "mouse eating grapes," "fish playing with lotus" and "snake coiling around rabbit" – made such an impression on me that I have adopted many of these features and techniques in my own paper-cutting craft, employing vivid crimson hues in traditional patterns.

In my work, I seek to extract and transform the traditional symbols of gender and sexuality in traditional Chinese paper-cutting and weave absurd stories around them, portraying the gendered issues that still affect Chinese women through a process of allegorical narrative.

My first story, originating in traditional paper-cuts featuring "mouse eating grapes." In this tale, grapes symbolise fecundity in women, while the mouse signifies masculinity. Progressively transforming traditional grape paper cuttings into character portraits, I extracted an endless procession of mice from the grape images. Within this narrative, Mickey Mouse, emblematic of Western culture, coexists with traditional mouse motifs, implying conflicts in the subjectivity and ideology of the protagonist.

In the era of globalisation, numerous male labourers migrate from rural China to urban centres and overseas for employment. At the same time, women, constrained by traditional norms, are compelled to become part of the "left behind" demographic.<sup>8</sup> The story culminates in my contemporary portrayal of "mouse eating grapes" within today's societal context.

My second story derives from the theme of "fish playing with lotus." Similar to the first story, the lotus represents women capable of bearing many children, while fish symbolise men. This traditional paper-cutting narrative depicts heterosexual activities. I expanded this story to narrate the birth of a girl amidst lotus flowers and her journey of gender awakening and encounters while growing up accompanied by fish.



Figure 5. Eva Ding,  
*I am not a Tool for Carrying on the Family Lineage*, 2023.  
Detail of story I – Mouse Eating Grapes.



Sexual assault remains a hidden issue and, even in contemporary China, societal and institutional protection for survivors of sexual assault remains inadequate. From abuse in schools and workplaces to marital rape, the patriarchal mindset of Chinese culture continues to perpetuate traditional notions that wearing revealing clothing or nighttime outings justifies sexual assault. China needs the #MeToo movement, but government suppression of and resistance to feminist developments remain significant barriers to women's quest for equal rights.

My third story originates in the traditional paper-cutting motif "snake coiling around rabbit," which was discussed above. Here, I interpret the snake pattern as a symbol of wealth, as in traditional Chinese culture, and introduce a potted plant with clusters of four leaves. The four-leaved plant and the symbol of wealth represent complementary aspects of positive and negative paper-cutting. As the potted plant slowly grows, it symbolises the girl's ongoing wealth accumulation. Beneath the surface of a narrative about a woman's fall and the exploitation of beauty and sexual relationships in order to amass personal wealth, there may lie some profound reflections on gender structures in Chinese society.



Figure 7. Eva Ding.  
*I am not a Tool for Carrying on the Family Lineage*,  
2023. Detail of story 3 –  
*Snake Coiling around Rabbit*.

As I began to explore this traditional Chinese folk-art form this year, the more I read and researched, the more it felt like I was taking an historical snapshot of Chinese society. Page by page, the story of paper cutting records the developmental journey of various ethnic groups with similar cultural backgrounds across different regions, akin to an ethnographic study. History seemed to unfold before my eyes, repeatedly following seemingly familiar yet elusive patterns, until suddenly I was powerfully reminded of Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.<sup>9</sup>

Like the novel's exploration of history's cyclical yet unpredictable nature, my reflections on Chinese culture, feminism and the uncertain future drew parallels with the intricate tapestry of time and events that unfold in the small town that features in Marquez's book. Is human existence, from the past into the future, predetermined or accidental? The novel's magical realism, which blurs the line between reality and fantasy, also reflects the complexity and uncertainty of the human experience, much like the intricate interplay of history and culture I am contemplating – a poignant reminder of our world's intricate and enigmatic character and of our place within it. In my cuttings, I have incorporated history into irregularly shaped red cardboard pieces, folded and extended page by page, creating narratives that depict the chance existence of an individual within history, while also reflecting the memories – cultural and personal – carried by most Chinese people.

In the end, my work involved paper cutting combined with abstract expression. Bamboo – a cultural symbol transformed from a structural material and passed down for thousands of years – embodies qualities of integrity, resilience and devotion. In one of my pieces, such material becomes a point of contention within the cultural framework. Random and irrational, a thicket of bamboo poles constitutes incomplete entities, and through subtle combinations of unbalanced forms made from sanitary pad paper – which is inherently linked to the female experience, particularly the bodily aspects of womanhood, menstruation and the societal taboos and stigmas surrounding them – creates a three-dimensional Chinese landscape painting. I render the white sanitary pad paper with ink splashes like a traditional Chinese *shan-shui* painting, imagining myself wandering amidst a majestic landscape while creating, trampling and rebelling against the historical tradition where Chinese women were limited to painting vegetation. Through this work, I was experimenting with a fusion of traditional Chinese folk-art forms and traditional Chinese scroll painting, shaping a collision between Chinese art and contemporary Western sculptural art seen through a feminist lens.



Figure 8. Eva Ding, *I am not a Tool for Carrying on the Family Lineage*, 2023. Installation images.

## REFLECTIONS

Unlike Western feminism, which gradually evolved from a foundation of individualistic democratic thought, China's journey has been an experimental attempt to transition directly from feudalism to socialism. This transition has lacked the awakening of independent autonomy and the support of democratic ideals. When women in collectivist-minded China lack independent awareness and freedom of thought, all the issues that feminism seeks to address – equal rights across various facets of society – are essentially rendered inconsequential. Conversely, when autonomy is mistakenly understood as a lifestyle of independence and freedom as a depoliticised form of self-help, it fails to square up to collective action and exacerbates the sense of vulnerability and loneliness felt by each individual.<sup>10</sup> While my experiences in New Zealand have granted me the freedom of self-expression, I cannot shake off the burden – “the burden of ideology” that “is located in its complexities and dilemmas.”<sup>11</sup> Detaching from responsibility is like running away from my identity and ridiculing those still in distress, akin to a survivor who, leaping from the sinking *Titanic* onto a lifeboat, exclaims, “Look, I am still alive!”

How will traditional culture transform itself in the face of the globalisation that is such a major factor in contemporary development processes? Will China gradually integrate with the world during the process of globalisation, or will it become increasingly isolated in a new wave of nationalism? Will Chinese women awaken to their independent individualities, endowed with freedom and democratic thinking, as the social and political landscape transforms (if it transforms), or will they struggle, caught in the zone between traditional and modern consciousness?

Chinese women have been uniquely shaped by both traditional culture and the distortions brought about by globalisation. It is as if, when reflecting on my past, half my experience has been endowed with my grandmother's gentle yet steadfast traditional cultural education, and the other half is marked by my self-transforming exploration of the impact of Western culture following immigration. Navigating the terrain of feminism in contemporary China's intricate political and cultural milieu remains challenging. Chinese female artists, over the years and within the context of a post-socialist, globalised China, have charted a course in order to discover an appropriate mode of expression that aligns with their convictions. This journey reflects an ongoing exploration aimed at confronting the complexities of feminism in the dynamic landscape of contemporary China.

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

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## THE RECONFIGURE PROJECT

Michele Beevors

Anger and rage threaten to spill over into everyday life at any moment; in the form of hysteria like Linda Blair in *The Exorcist*.<sup>1</sup> Every time we open our mouths the words come spewing out in a torrent of terse, tumbled thoughts at high pitch, aimed at demolishing everyone. We are angry about injustice, about society's tolerance for violence against women. We are angry at the telco who calls us "madam," we are angry at the bank that treats us like criminals. We can never quite manage to hide it, the rage. Our faces always betray us. It must be the knitted brows of our constant companion, the migraine or endometriosis. The derogatory term for this rage is resting bitch face, a way of putting us back in our place, of dismissing the rage. We feel it, most often when we are silenced. It is palpable.

Most women have a period for 40 years. A constant forgetting and playing catch up, it can be a living hell. Followed by menopause lasting a further seven to 14 years: a different kind of hell envelopes every waking moment. If we seem a little shrill or confrontational, this is clearly the source of our rage. Western society prescribes tonics for what ails us and taboos to contain the rage; this is the equivalent of waving a red flag.

It's tragic that we argue amongst ourselves when we need so desperately to organise.

Lauren Elkin's recent book *Art Monsters*<sup>2</sup> strives to resolve the friction in understanding the monstrous. Writing against Barbara Creed's initial idea – one which named the monstrous as it appeared in *Horror Film* as a masculine construction of the female monster in films such as Cronenberg's *The Brood* or Brian De Palma's *Carrie* – Elkin examines the monstrous where it resides in a feminist literature and art history. She begins with Virginia Woolf and focuses on an embodied female experience that is abject, painful, full of rage and excess, one that seeks to overturn the essentialising critique aimed at the beautiful, youthful bodies of Ana Mendieta and Hannah Wilkie, a critique which buried them in obscurity. Elkin wants to restore them to their rightful place as trailblazers within an art historical canon. In over 200 *Siluetas* Mendieta made visible the invisible ties between female biology, rage and the natural world. We are not separate from nature, we are inevitably tied to it, our bodies bear the scars. Scars that Wilkie and Mendieta externalised.<sup>3</sup>

The artist Kiri Mitchell and I talk about rage a lot. As it developed, the Reconfigure Project became an attempt to turn our anger into action. What we discussed turned out to be various shrill configurations of the monstrous, embodied experience of women's daily lives in material forms: wallpaper that seems to be screeching at your eyeballs; a manifestation of anxiety crossed with embroidery; big sculptures of women's actual bodies, figures that demonstrate impoliteness; or video works where violence in our homes, inflicted on our bodies, is constantly justified by deferring to the ideal body or endured because we always put others first.

In 2017 the exhibition "Reconfigure" was staged in a suburban house. The initial exhibition was designed to reinvigorate the landmark historical enterprise of *Woman House*,<sup>4</sup> initiated in 1972 by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, which highlighted the lack of a place to exhibit work by women within the closed system of the art establishment and to examine representations of women by women. Alongside "Reconfigure," we held a symposium, "Figuration and Feminism," at Dunedin School of Art. This project mapped some of the discussions that



Kiri Mitchell, *Bed Bath and Beyond* (detail), 2021, felted Romney wool 1800x1100x800mm.

had taken place after *Woman House*, such as the problematic of the male gaze that defines women as objects, not subjects, as discussed by Laura Mulvey in her ground-breaking essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). While the eighties saw the Guerilla Girls<sup>5</sup> rampage through New York highlighting inequality in the art world – if the art world is defined as New York – in novel ways, it seemed that representations of figures of women were taboo in painting and sculpture. Only a few examples of the female body as abject object/subject, à la Kiki Smith, made it onto the scene during the nineties.

In the Art School where we both taught, it seemed like a different set of trends were emerging. We were working with Master of Fine Arts students who were interested in dragging the female figure out of Sandy Orgels' *Linen Closet*<sup>6</sup> and into the limelight and putting the figure to work for us. This was something that I had felt was necessary since my encounter with education American-style in the nineties. Suddenly there were enough students interested in body politics and how advertising still used sex to sell products, and how these images that still filled our screens diverged from every woman any of us had ever encountered. The initial exhibition featured work by then students Shelley McConaughy, who focused on the maddening routine of housework; Megan Brady (the smooth and tidy middle-class body and home); Francine Keach, who made a video work which explored do-it-yourself Botox via a reading of the slapstick comedy of Lucille Ball, as evoked by Sianne Ngai;<sup>7</sup> and Sarah Baird, who made an army (300) of small ceramic fist-waving, multicoloured figures. Along with their offerings, Mitchell's video, *How to decorate a cake*, and my own *self-sucking saddles* came together in Mitchell's suburban house in South Dunedin. We hired a bus and ferried people out to see it. In the spirit of *Woman House*, we were doing it for ourselves.

As time passes some things change and some stay the same. The initial premise, of somewhere to exhibit, remained a consistent problem. Kiri Mitchell, Sarah Baird and I thought the project should be ongoing and so worked towards nurturing local interest and showcasing emerging artists working in the terrain of body image. "Configure" was exhibited at Ashburton Art Gallery in 2021, with Kylie Norton, Tamara Nicholson and Maggie Covell. Adopting new strategies, where media can be used to reconstruct old stereotypes in a critical way for a contemporary media-savvy audience, Mitchell, Baird and myself sought to re-establish a place where the image of the female can find new sculptural form through a material insistence on the haptic,<sup>8</sup> desiring bodies of every woman, not just the twenty-somethings usually represented and typecast as representable. Norton's embroidered encounters with text messaging and the violence of online dating; Nicholson's video projections of a dystopic suburbia; and Covell's multifaceted social project involving participatory workshops, focus groups and billboard sites all highlighted the barely visible lives of women outside the prescribed but limited social norm, together providing a means of directing our audience to conflicting readings of what it means to demonstrate the female monster.

I was surprised at the underlying violence in each of the works we selected – as if we never see the patterns of behaviour that have become ingrained, but are reflected in loneliness, in date rape and in capitalism's will to maintain the perfect body through a series of overt social relations (the selfie and social media) or echoed in the labouring bodies of working-class women, but forgotten instantly.

Sarah Baird's *The Bertha Revolution* is a call to arms, a demonstration against invisibility. On the surface, a Lilliputian army of multicoloured, naked but angry figures, waving their little fists in the air, seems funny. One need only remember what the Lilliputians did to Gulliver and the work turns from slight to serious. In attempting to make the multitude visible, Baird's army assembles an image of collective spirit for feminism.<sup>9</sup> One where difference is acknowledged but solidarity is maintained. The collective solidarity of assembly unifies a "web of relations"<sup>10</sup> into a fight for women's rights – one that acknowledges each woman's rebellion as unique, but that stops that response from being fragmented and dismissed and indeed galvanises what Nicholas Mirzoeff calls "a space for appearance."<sup>11</sup> A space to see and listen to each other. While Baird's tiny figures are painted in unexpected colours – baby-shit green, blood-clotted red, old ladies' lavender, mustard yellow and a grubby cerulean blue – they are not reflective of any one group or single ideology, but nonetheless allude to differences of race, gender and class. Her lumpy, grumpy bodies resemble the disenfranchised and invisible bodies of middle-aged women. If the Berthas are angry, they have every right to be.



Figure 2. Sarah Baird, *The Bertha Revolution Continued* (detail), 2017, ceramic 100 figures, various dimensions.



Figure 3. Sarah Baird, *Red Flag*, 2023.



Figure 4. Kiri Mitchell, *TURF* (still image) 2021, video stills.

The idea of not being seen is explored in Kiri Mitchell's short animation, *Turf*, where the main character Pat (Malone) attempts to drown out the noise of contemporary nonsense in order to recognise herself. In the narrative, a space of redemption is sought through the definition of friendship. Pat sees herself reflected in her own likeness, Pat. Mitchell then doubles down on this idea through references to popular culture (*Pulp Fiction*'s dance sequence) and by mining her own history of labouring, a workforce assembled by Beryl act as co-conspirators, on ride-on lawnmowers, while flame-throwing Pat as *Alien*'s Ripley<sup>12</sup> evokes a scorched-earth policy which restores balance and quiet. Meantime, to reinforce the central idea – to be seen – a series of large-scale sculptured portrait busts of Beryl that echo versions of the good neighbour; but reference a different, unspoken heroism, are constructed from fake hedging, hydrangeas, faux marble and woolly felting – those working-class craft versions of middle-class sensibilities that are incorporated into the schema of the home beautiful on a budget, echoing neighbourly competition and how-to-do-it community crafts. A three-metre sculpture constructed with plastic box hedging of a big-breasted matron, a monstrous mother; Beryl is a 'Mother Nature' with irony. While the materials used represent an idealised version of woman/nature – clean, manageable, safe and picturesque – the toxic, man-made plastic product is conflated with the image of the female body and gross categorisations of landscape to confront those who are only too willing to typecast menopausal women as 'past it'.

Disneyfication picks up on Nicholas Mirzoeff's<sup>13</sup> idea of the invisibility of the structures of authority, in that the mechanisms of authority are normalised through the dominant aesthetic. These works seek to undermine Disney's narratives of the good girl by insisting that there is more at stake in the violence implied by the cartoon. In "Debbie Does Disney," exhibited at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 2008, work after work attempts to tell a different story than a Grimm<sup>14</sup> interpretation would have it. Christian morality and family structures are played out, as women can be violent too; schoolyard bullying and harassment circle around a work like *The Raft of the Medusa: Blood and Guts in High School* as the schoolyard bitch fight finds its full force. *DUCK* undermines the role of violence implied by popular culture, reversing the roles of victim and victimiser. *MMMM* invokes the spirit of Marilyn Monroe, specifically a sequence of photographs taken in 1955 and used as stills in *the Seven Year Itch*,<sup>15</sup> whereby the camera records something like Monroe's pure pleasure in being a woman. In my version, the onlooker's gaze is met by the opacity of the faux fur; which deadens its potential for categorisation, undoing standard representations which stereotypically identify the body of woman as something to be consumed by the gaze, and redoing it – revelling in Monroe's libidinal desire as animal, monstrous and carefree.

In Tamara Nicholson's videos *Jelly* and *Gravy*, which occupy two adjacent walls, we see opposing views, the effects of keeping up appearances. The pressure that society places on us if we do conform to the mother/ father/ two-and-a-half children option is now extreme. Struggling to be a good soccer mum and foodie goddess, or the typical-yet-resentful breadwinner, is for some a private version of hell, one that is endured year after festering year. In *Jelly* an impossible and Sisyphean task is played out: the figure, who we only see through her hands, attempts desperately (but fails miserably) to scoop a collapsed jelly terrine back together. In *Gravy* we see a man sitting at the dinner table, dressed in a white shirt. He pours gravy all over his food over and over again. He looks at the camera while pouring. The work plays on the relentless monotony of having to do the same thing day after day, year after year;



Figure 5. Michele Beevors, *Penicillin Pink*, 2021, faux fur and mixed media, 2000x1000x1000mm.



Figure 6. Michele Beevors, *Raft of the Medusa: Blood and Guts in Highschool*, 2010, fibreglass, steel, enamel paint, 2000×1700×1700mm.



Figure 7. Tamara Nicholson, *Jelly* (still image), *Gravy* (still image), 2019. Video installation.

eating the same meal. And yet there is an undertone of violence here, too, hinted at in the man's menacing look and his moustache. It is interesting that while the male looms over the screen, threatening to spill over; the female is represented by her hands alone, fragmented, yet it is her labour that is holding things together.

Kylie Norton uses embroidery and cross-stitch to examine the temporary and tenuous nature of dating in the digital world. Joining a host of fourth-wave feminist embroiderers protesting the abuses of power that women still encounter daily, she renders her throwaway Tinder messages and Instagram pages with loving care as a permanent reminder of how far we have come and how far we have yet to go. Norton's embroidery tells it like it is, just between us girls, and in so doing she lays bare, in a conversational way, those things our grandmothers' generation once kept secret. The brutality of the dating scene in the age of Tinder: rendered in carefully stitched quotes from text messages, female figures display their bruised necks and risky behaviours. Embroidery is the opposite of text messaging, which is gone instantly.<sup>16</sup> Embroidery once defined femininity: the task of prescribing behaviour in a ladylike fashion, sitting quietly for hours in one spot and working with care so that we could prove to the world we were marriage-worthy is taken up by Norton to re-examine what those failed stereotypes and social norms mean for contemporary women. We will not keep your secrets for you, and we have the means to do it. Work like Norton's demonstrates the power of #MeToo – technology effecting change, online platforms that can bring people together in ways unimagined by our mothers' generation.

In *Hidden in Plain Sight*, a series of staged billboards, workshops and online focus groups, Maggie Covell insists on making visible the unseen: rape statistics in New Zealand are shameful, the implications for women's mental health and the toll it takes, horrendous. The digitised, high-key-coloured patterns embedded in Covell's wallpapers represent common household items, the colour emphasising a sense of hypersaturation and sensitivity to ordinary things. The digital glitch opens a feeling of unease and disease in the fabric of a society that tends to wallpaper over the cracks of uncivilised behaviours. Covell also understands the importance of opening up a dialogue and dragging those secrets into the public realm, creating a safe space for discussion and a sense of solidarity. The community embodies the idea of working together, of thinking through things together, and making spaces where celebration is a part of the encounter (workshops and live music venues) – taking us back to the beginning, where the Art School provides a safe environment, one where all kinds of differences can be examined.

"Configure: Home," exhibited at He Waka Tuia 2023, returned to the home as theme, this time in a series of encounters with the lonely and aging body, having an existential crisis over an exercise bike or with more recent developments around gendered identity. Unlike previous exhibitions at the Forrester Gallery in Oamaru and Ashburton Art Gallery, which concentrated on the figure, this exhibition was specifically designed to address the idea of the home and the influence of 'commodity' with a more critical eye. As successive waves of feminism have addressed the shifting ground around identity politics, and cultural and gendered responses to an all-white, middle-classist approach to the question of "Who is speaking for whom and why?" are canvassed, various positions are identified and articulated through the image of woman. Different strategies for dealing with commodity are used to break apart the old stereotypes that continue to confine bodies and minds.

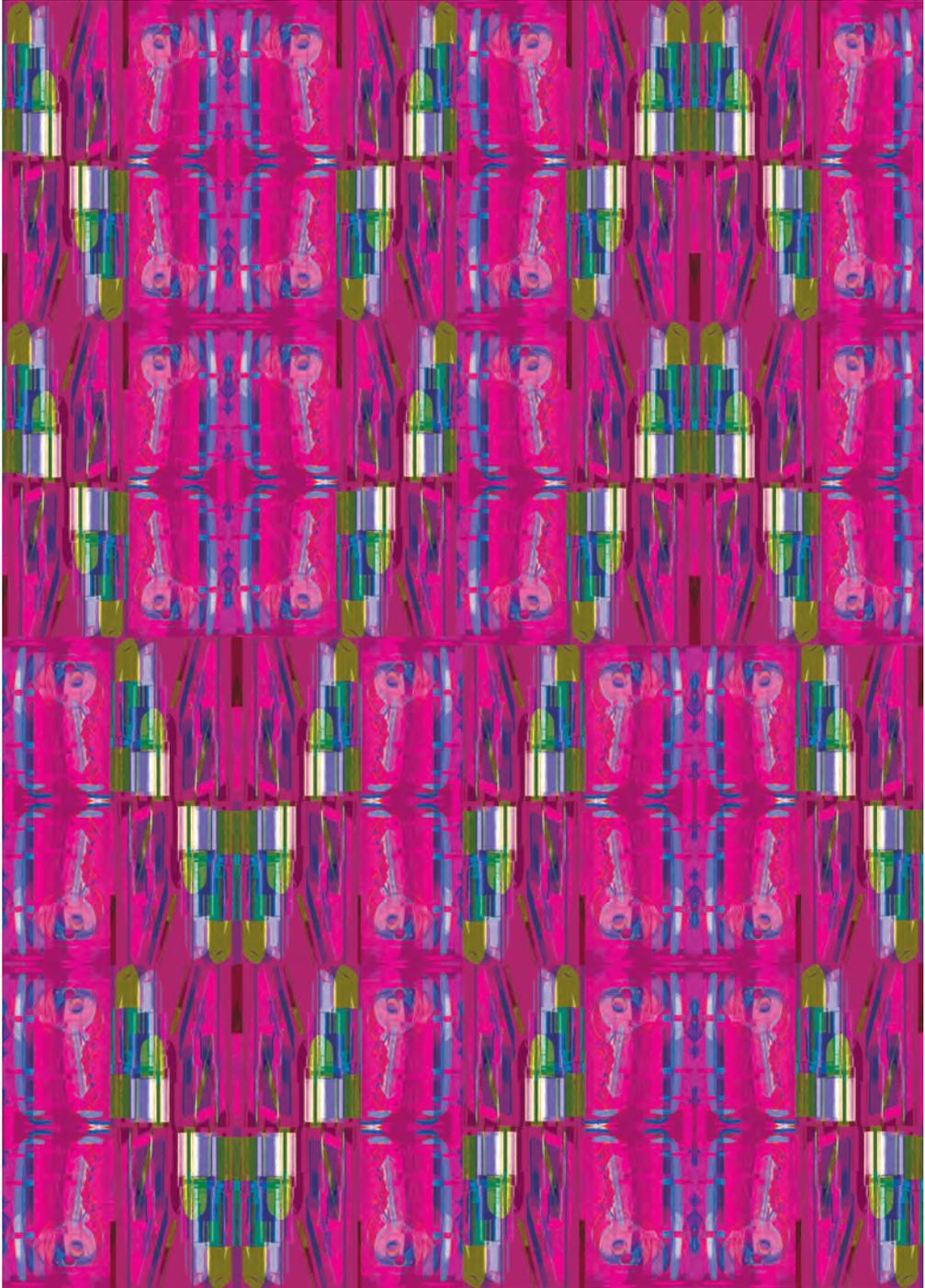


Figure 8. Maggie Covell, *Trauma Chevron*, from the *Hidden in Plain Sight Project*, 2021, wallpaper treatment.

Richard Hamilton's iconic 1969 work, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* exposed the way that advertisements, shaped by stereotypes of gender, sold the idea of having 'stuff' to the world. Pop art's emblematic couple, the body builder and the babe, explored the idea that we had a choice in the matter; their identities reduced to the mantra, "you are what you own." The whole world bought this idea and reduced everyone to being a slave to the commodity.

In Norton's new works, identity equals commodity. In *Diet Coke*, *Winfield Menthol* and *Lady Shave* disposable razors replace Ford Pills and shape-forming girdles, but the drift is the same — to change one's image to please the man and, I might add, other women, judging from the narcissism that the social media revolution has bought about. Norton's work here gives us the full picture: thinliness, like cleanliness, is next to ... well, you know. But there is something about the persistence of the stitching that unravels the plan. The works are large, much larger than the actual commodity, but the stitching is so small, and the compulsion is so big. Our addiction to commodity is so extreme there is no escaping it. However, you just have to wait a moment and the slogans and jingles and negativity that fill your head come flooding back as a scar on the surface of the work. This obsession with stuff and image is echoed in earlier works addressed to a generation of women 'dating' on Tinder. Dating is such an antiquated term in today's online culture, and 'hooking up' seems too soft a term for what really goes on — more like the "fucking and punching" of *Californication*.<sup>17</sup> Risky behaviour just got exponentially riskier as body image continues to be a primary mode of prescriptive control, as women judge women. Too fat — too thin. Never enough.



Figure 9. Kylie Norton, *Winfield*, 2023, embroidery.



Figure 10. Kylie Norton, *All the Single Ladies*, 2023, embroidery.

For Nicholson now the home is a workplace, a workout space, where the female toils at getting nowhere all day long. This work, too, is about body image – the repetitions, the frantic pace or slow monotony of endless toil by the mother; while the child swims in a dreamscape of amniotic fluid in the bathtub, oblivious of the bubble, amid the efforts of the mother to obliterate her own trace and the abject traces of the child. The theme of the endless unfolding of time juxtaposed with frantic activity is methodologically applied to other videos in the series. Failure and menace versus monotony and obliviousness.

In my own work in “Configure: Home,” the home and the commodity are united through the notion of maintenance. Products for cleaning are examined, turned inside out; these soft sculptures become the dust-catchers of decoration. The soft breeze blocks almost carry the smell of bleach and here, too, the mother's trace and that of the child are magically whisked away. Joy and magic exist in the clean and tidy home, where one can enjoy the experience of being home alone. To have a room of one's own, to dance naked with the curtains drawn, to exude pleasure in one's own body are themes that run through the other works as well. Fake fur M&Ms, all animal instinct and pleasure of the flesh (or fur) in your mouth. *Black Beauty*, like previous versions of self-sucking saddles, demands contact with the naked body, and yet any potential pleasure is denied through the material transformation of animal to object, of surface to sandpaper. The work is abrasive to the imagination.

Mitchell's animated world, *RSI*, is full of sadness. The old lady behind a grubby window reveals a house denuded of furniture and knick-knacks. There is nothing left of a life in the service of others, except an empty house and an immensity of loneliness. Loneliness is a theme of the late-night office cleaner who dies at work, as well. There is something sadistic in the way the characters reap what they sew. In Mitchell's animated works *Turf*, *How to Make a Cake* or *RSI*, the characters swap roles as victim/victimiser; they are often the victims of a lifetime of self-obliteration, of giving oneself for others: children, husbands, the elderly. Women being overlooked is a consistent theme in Mitchell's work. Her sculptures are monumental encounters with the strength and vitality of the matronly body. Light on her feet and sleight of hand, not leaving anything to chance, in *Bed Bath & Beyond* the undervalued material of the craft shop is congealed to examine every voluptuous curve of the fearless middle-aged woman as she turns into the aging matron who outlives her generation, with saggy boobs down to her knees – one who now has nothing left to lose.

Covell has other ideas. In wallpaper designs made to look pretty in pink, lie secrets – concealed in the pattern, under the colours, hidden in plain sight. Amid the all-too-real statistics of rape and violence against women, the pushback for body autonomy, women's voices fall to silent screams. The wallpaper is overwhelming in its overlapping stories and high-key colours. Images of the pills that control our behaviour and the car keys which we clutch to keep us safe form the patterns, while words are obliterated by information overload. Covell's project which, at an earlier stage, included online focus groups and workshops intended to gather these stories, went on to examine them in the context of the law faculty at Otago University. Most recently, they were exhibited at the Forrester Gallery, alongside blackboards where staff, students and the general public could add to or erase the content – and in so doing become complicit in silencing women's voices.

Judy Chicago's work *Red Flag*<sup>18</sup> is referenced by Baird – still waving obliquely after all these years. Chicago's photo litho-print of a woman pulling a bloody tampon from her body shocked the art world in 1971. A graphic encounter with the human body, in a way that had never been seen before, has been replaced in Baird's work by a row of diminishing, fist-waving figures, printed on a 3D printer from a digital scan of an early sculpture. The marvels of technology aside, the message is still clear: hands off our bodies. This message, however, is portrayed in a very distinctive way, one that focuses attention on the construction of the word 'woman' for those in the LGBTQ community. For gender, as constructed and codified through language and use in an attempt to open up new meanings, comes close to diminishing the real lives of those whom feminism seeks to protect when we put empathy aside and resort to name-calling.

New to the group, Anna Muirhead spent a long time working and living in China, far from Invercargill where she grew up, experiencing the birth of her son as well as suffering a major health catastrophe thousands of miles from home. Her series of watercolours examine this time through a diary documenting the ordinary workings of the hospital where she stayed, but also the extraordinary effect that a crisis of this kind can have on one's family. The watercolours are intensely personal and tender; yet they transcend this, because they invoke feelings of empathy. Among the many images there is a very pale drawing of an empty hospital cot. It reaches out from the page it is drawn on and touches your heart. Home, after all, is where the heart is.



Anna Muirhead, *Pill*, 2023, watercolour.

An historical precedent for most of the work in this project can be found in a careful investigation of *Woman House*; from Sarah Baird citing Judy Chicago's *Red Flag* to Faith Wilding's *Waiting*,<sup>19</sup> a poem and performance that demonstrated the immensity of a life given in the service of others, to the real loneliness expressed in Mitchell's *RSI*.

The work is ongoing for each of the artists involved.

Watch this space.

**Michele Beevors** is an Australian artist and principal lecturer Dunedin School of Art where she has taught sculpture for the past 22 Years.

- 1 William Friedkin, *The Exorcist* (Warner Bros, 1971).
- 2 "Her Body is a problem." For a discussion of the essentialist label aimed at Wilkie and others who dismissed the complexity of the work, see Lauren Elkin, *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art* (Penguin Random House UK, 2023).
- 3 See Claire Johnson, *Femininity, Time and Feminist Art* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) for an in-depth analysis of Hannah Wilkie's contribution to a radical feminist art practice. See also "Feminist Narratives and Unfaithful Repetition: Hannah Wilkie's Starification Object Series" and "Critical Mimesis: Hannah Wilkie's Double Address," and Ana Mendieta, *Silueta Series*, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/5221>.
- 4 Woman House, <https://judychicagoportal.org/projects/womanhouse>.
- 5 Guerilla Girls, <https://www.guerrillagirls.com/>.
- 6 Sandy Orgels, <https://artreview.com/ar-april-2018-feature-womanhouse/>
- 7 Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute and Interesting* (Harvard University Press, 2015). In the chapter on Zany, Ngai analyses the slapstick moments of *I Love Lucy* to reveal the relationship of gender to labour.
- 8 The obese, all-encompassing, fat matronly body in Mitchell's work *Bed Bath and Beyond*, made with wool and faux flowers, or plastic hedging, invites touch; while Baird's small ceramic figures, a multicoloured army placed on the floor, invite a certain amount of aggression towards the material from young male viewers and encourages these tactile encounters. I have spent my entire teaching career extolling the importance of the material /content /form interchange.
- 9 Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counter History of Visuality* (Duke University Press, 2011). See introduction.
- 10 Mirzoeff turns from the individual to the collective as a means of opening up and laying bare the way that institutions of power become naturalised.
- 11 In relation to Black Lives Matter protests, Mirzoeff argues that community is larger than 'us' and 'them' and that there has to be room for oppositional arguments, yet he understands that this coming together, while inclusive, is also provisional. He also emphasises the element of joy in seeing a multitude of likeminded individuals rather than destruction experienced by the collective. There are lessons here for intersectional feminists, for sure.
- 12 Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 1993). In the chapter "Horror and the Archaic Mother," Ripley, the heroine in the *Alien* franchise, shifts between feminine and masculine positions as she dresses in a robot suit and takes up various weapons to fight the female egg-laying alien with two sets of teeth (*Vagina dentata, dentata*). See also Ridley Scott, *Alien* (20th Century Fox and Brandywine, 1979).
- 13 Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*.
- 14 In the Grimm's fairytales, moral conflict is resolved in relation to good girl/bad girl behaviours, storylines rendered banal by Disney. See Amy M Davis, *Good Girls and Wicked Witches: Women in Disney's Feature Animation* (Eastleigh, UK: John Libbey, 2006). My work in "Debbie Does Disney" attempts to get closer to an understanding of the initial tales, and the monsters they invoke; for example, as a contemporary depiction of mother's love, the junky mother/Sleeping Beauty of the sculpture *Nevermore* (2008) hints at the complexity of addiction, rape, bestiality and post-partum depression.
- 15 Billy Wilder; *The Seven Year Itch* (20th Century Fox, 1955).
- 16 While embroidery is slow work for the artist (taking months of painstaking labour) and remains a trace of hand and body, viewed on a mobile phone – on Instagram or X or sent in a message – the viewer's encounter takes a few seconds and becomes disembodied evidence. We absorb the information supplied by each at the same rate, quickly. While online platforms provide hope for a new kind of connection, they also can be difficult to manage, as what you say online is caught and comes back to haunt you. The digital archive is yet to be understood as a volatile place, rife with potential criminality – everything you ever uttered on your phone can be used against you, rearranged, re-imaged, reminding us that we are not digitally safe.
- 17 *Californication* was an American TV series created by Tom Kapinos (2007–14). The storyline focuses on the male protagonist, Hank Moody, a failing writer supported by a host of female characters who fall into stereotypes (a too-young femme fatale, an unreachable baby mamma, or a kind but conflicted daughter) but are never Moody's equal. The term "fucking and punching" is lifted from *Californication* to describe sexual violence against the male protagonist.
- 18 Judy Chicago, *Red Flag*, 1971, photo lithograph.
- 19 Faith Wilding, *Waiting*, Vimeo video, <https://vimeo.com/388693458>.

## BACKYARD BIODIVERSITY | MANAAKITANGA TE TAIAO

Meg Brasell-Jones

This article has been written with contributions from Catriona MacLeod and Jenny Rock.

*Design can and must be a way in which young people can participate in changing society.*

Victor Papanek<sup>1</sup>

It was as an undergraduate that I encountered the writings of designer and educator Victor Papanek. His persuasive philosophy encouraged me to use design, not to peddle “tawdry idiocies”,<sup>2</sup> but to create meaningful solutions for social and environmental good. And, although I am no longer young, this thinking continues to be the impetus behind my creative practice today.

Papanek (1995) identifies two fundamental changes in modern civilisation: humans have relocated indoors, and they now have the ability to catastrophically throw the natural world off balance. This designer's page presents visual communication design for an interdisciplinary project that responds to the challenge of encouraging people outside, to regenerate their immediate environments.

The mahi for this project aimed to generate a shared and enriched understanding of local (and national) ‘backyard biodiversity’. At its core, the Backyard biodiversity | Manaakitanga te taiao project was collaborative and set out to foster connections, develop awareness and inspire positive action. My contribution was just one part of this joint effort that included scientists, artists, communities, individuals and their ecosystems. Commencing in 2022, the project continued into 2023 as a nine-day public exhibit for the New Zealand (International) Science Festival (NZISF). This interactive exhibit was designed around the theme of ‘making backyards happy spaces for us and nature’ and was hosted by the Golden Centre Mall in the centre of Ōtepoti Dunedin. As well as infographics and photography, there was an evolving programme of activities, which aimed to nurture participants’ skills and agency, to engage with backyard biodiversity and its care.

The exhibition resources and activities were designed by our project team working in partnership with organisations and individuals with diverse expertise: New Zealand International Science Festival (science communication), Our Food Network (creating food-engaged communities), local gardeners (sharing their stories), Runaway Play (online games inspired by nature), WI-links (science communication), NZ Garden Bird Survey (citizen science), Luke Easterbrook-Clarke (interactive art installations), Ecosystems Photography (images and conversations to sustain Aotearoa), the Golden Centre Mall (community engagement) and the Photo Gallery (printing specialists). Exhibit set-up

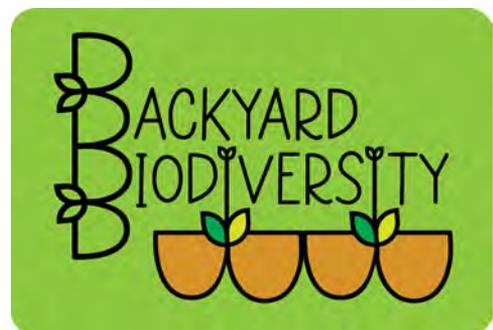


Figure 1. Meg Brasell-Jones, *Backyard Biodiversity* logo, 2023.



Figure 2. Collaborative ideation and design development space on Canva, 2023. Screenshot by Meg Brasell-Jones.



Figure 3. Meg Brasell-Jones, Icons for project values, 2022.

and implementation was also supported by a large team of volunteers mainly from these organisations but also young staff from Manaaki Whenua (Bobbie Rushton and Becky Parmenter) and high school student (Izzy Fyfe) who were inspired by the project concept.

My role in this collaborative project, as visual communication designer, was to develop a series of supportive graphics. The first stage of the design process was to share knowledge and ideas with fellow collaborators; Jenny Rock, social artist and educator, and Catriona MacLeod, researcher at Landcare Research. As well as face-to-face and online meetings, the group shared ideas, images and research on digital platforms, Trello and Canva (see Figure 2). A logo for the project was developed as an identifier for future steps, applications, and collateral related to the project (see Figure 1). A set of six values was agreed upon and an icons designed for each, to draw attention to the qualities that could be enhanced with backyard biodiversity (see Figure 3).

The second stage of the design process was to develop visuals of fauna and flora to represent native and common species of Aotearoa New Zealand. The brief for these images was to capture the unique characteristics of our natural environment, in a simple and vibrant manner. The first creature to emerge was the *pepe para riki*, a small endemic butterfly commonly found in coastal habitats. The backyard biodiversity family then grew to include a range of insects, birds, skinks, frogs, fungi, garden features and plants (see Figure 4). As the image catalogue of species grew, so did assets — to compliment scenes of thriving backyards. This included elements such as ponds, compost heaps, pest control devices and gardening equipment. The idea was to make a connection between the regeneration of available green spaces and the benefits to people and planet. Importantly, the design assets for this project, initially created to visually populate a flourishing backyard, became part of a library of images to apply across print and digital media. As a shared resource, these will be available to enhance further science communication and elicit engagement into the future.



Figure 4. Meg Brasell-Jones, A few of the digital illustrations for backyard fauna, 2022.

To articulate concepts of biodiversity beyond individual species, a series of six infographics were created; each focusing on a particular element of backyard biodiversity; *Ground Cover*, *Trees and Shrubs*, *Vegetables*, *Flowers*, *Envirotools* and *Herbs*. Each graphic was designed to highlight ways to enhance backyards and explain why, for example, growing vegetables can help us be more self-sufficient and reduce food miles or express our identity through those plants' geographic and cultural history (see Figures 6 and 7). Other supportive material included a series of 34 small information cards. Each 'seed idea' focussed on a specific action or plant to grow within a given garden layer, and the multidimensional benefits those could deliver. These were used as prompts in workshops run by Jenny Rock, with students from Carisbrook Intermediate School (see Figure 5). Finally, exhibition graphics were developed to engage visitors during the NZSIF. These large-format visuals were used to draw people in, but also served as an interactive



Figure 5. Meg Brasell-Jones, Information cards, 2022.

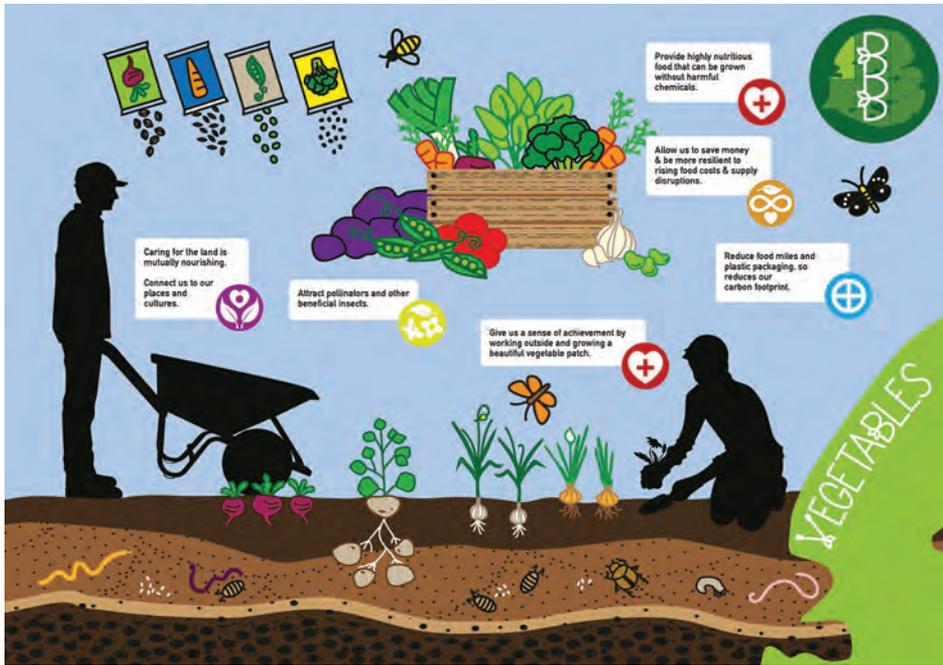


Figure 6. Meg Brasell-Jones, *Vegetables*, 2023. A0 infographic.

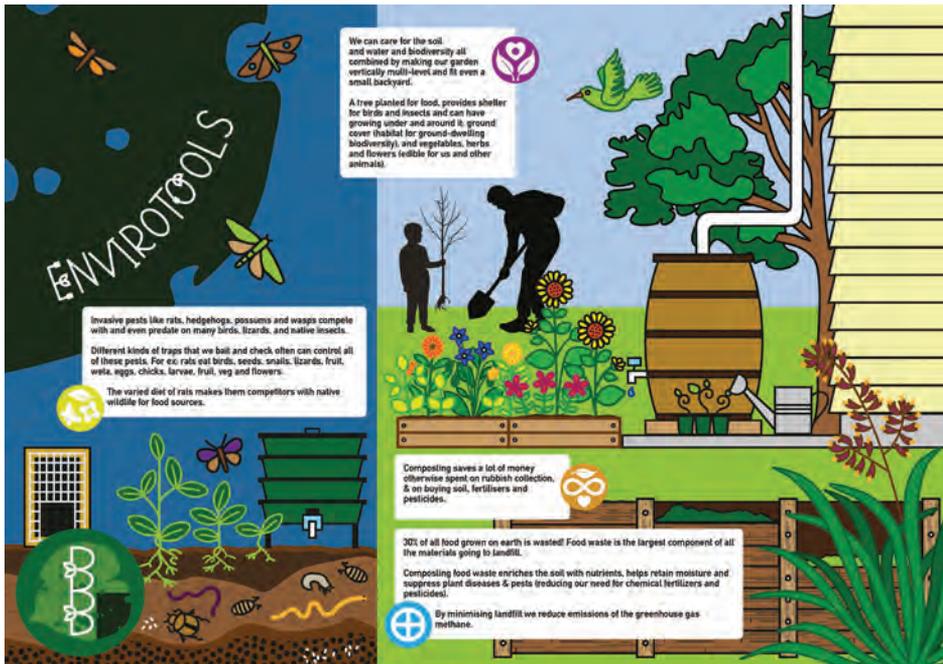


Figure 7. Meg Brasell-Jones, *Envirotools*, 2023. A0 infographic.

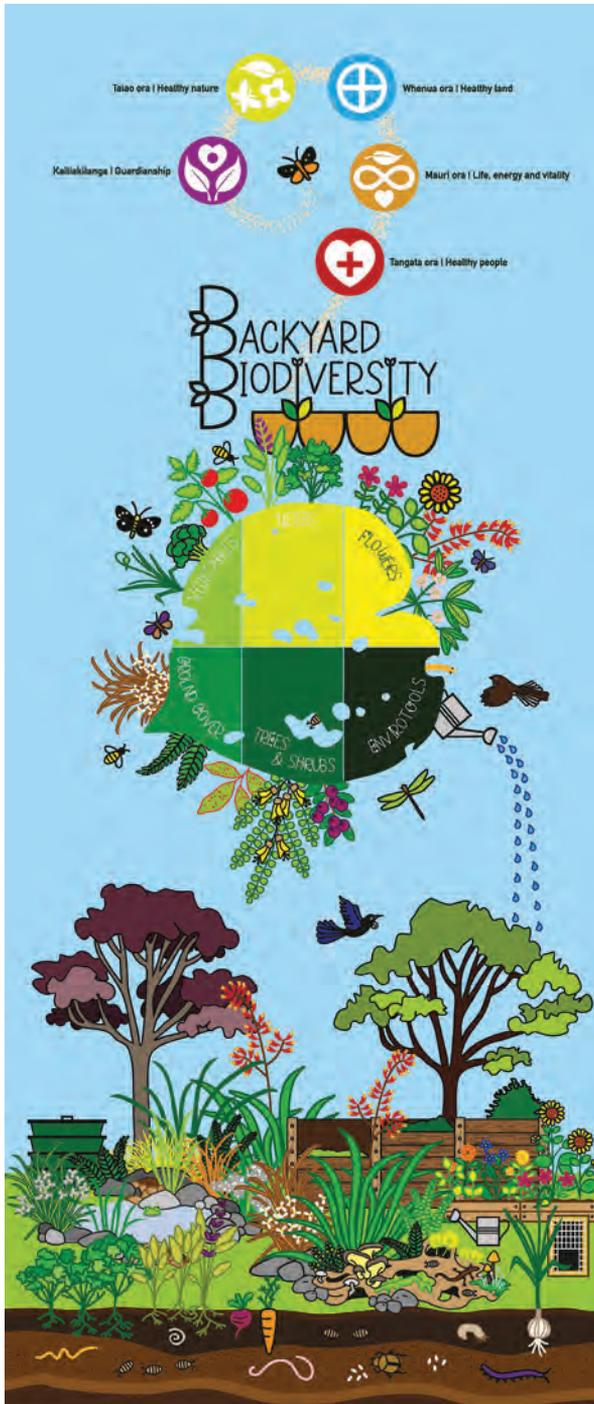


Figure 8. Meg Brasell-Jones, Exhibition banner, 2023.

opportunity. A vertical pull-up banner communicated the project's values, as well as its themes, via a *kawakawa* leaf. Known for its medicinal and nutritional properties, this endemic plant species became a symbol of beneficial backyard engagement and was used to showcase the six areas of engagement (see Figure 8). This graphic device was also used on social media, and the project's accompanying website. A large-scale horizontal graphic was used to wrap around the exhibition kiosk in the *Golden Centre Mall*. This also helped draw attention to the exhibition, while simultaneously acting as a suggested outdoor scene, for participants to add stickers to, from the catalogue of illustrated flora and fauna. Over the course of the exhibition, a thriving backyard evolved. Four large, A0 posters (see Figures 9-11) were also collated and displayed, to inspire action and to celebrate the input from others in the community; *Inspiring Art* (from printmaking workshop participants), *Inspiring Gardeners*, (stories of people already making a difference in Ōtepoti Dunedin), *Inspiring Images* (selected from *Ecosystems Photography*) and *Creating Food-Engaged Communities* (with tips for success).

For me, Backyard biodiversity | Manaakitanga te taiao yielded several useful benefits. First, collaboration and sharing were key to the success and reach of this multi-disciplinary project. Early on, it became clear that Catriona, Jenny and I, all possess a strong interest in ecology and creativity. This dual focus fuelled a vigorous cross-fertilisation of ideas and collective output. Online platforms enabled us to share knowledge, brainstorm, ideate and develop ideas. This ensured a connected approach, despite each of us being simultaneously engaged in various other projects, and at times, in different places around Aotearoa New Zealand and abroad. In this way, we were able to capitalise on each other's resources, relationships, expertise and energy.

# INSPIRING GARDENERS

Ōtepoti Dunedin



Karen made raised beds all over her South Dunedin lawn when she moved in just six years ago. She grows fruit trees and vegetables and flowers and herbs all together wherever she can cram them in – even strawberries out of an old gutter! She collects rainwater for the garden, and has a worm farm to turn compost into her fertilizer.

South Dunedin



Trevor and Jenny's Portobello home is on poor clay soil but they grow vegetables in raised beds and pots. And just their tiny patch of greens alone saves them \$10-15 a week! Where they don't have vegetables or fruit bushes, they have native trees that shelter and feed the birds, two pairs of kiwi nested in their garden this year!

Portobello



Four student flats back one a shared garden created by the University of Otago. This "sustainability playground" has a compost bin, three worm farms, a greenhouse, and lots of lady thorn bees. Students say, "Once you know what you're doing, it's kind of easy."

*"A lot of the stuff we grow here, you have to buy in plastic in the store, and it has food miles on it. Growing it yourself, it removes ecologically unfriendly elements."*

Students Flats

Dunedin City



Bary Harding & his family's backyard garden on George Street is a 200 m<sup>2</sup> urban section turned into a beautiful orchard. It is inspirational as the team offers tours & workshops. George Street Orchard.

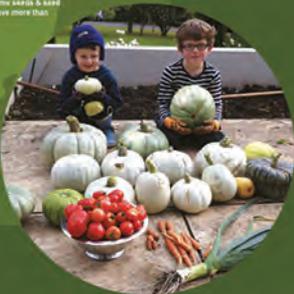
St Kilda

Emma-Kate Lamb & her family not only garden in St Kilda but also share seeds & seedlings from it! For 5 years they have been sharing vegetables & flower seeds as well as seedlings from their front gate at the St Kilda Seed and Seedling Store. <https://www.facebook.com/stkildaseed/>

MacAndrew Bay

For \$20 or less on some seeds & seed seedlings you could save more than \$100 on groceries.

In Oct a Dunedin supermarket was charging \$2.00 for cabbages, \$3.00 for a head of broccoli & kale (at \$200), \$4.25 - \$4.99 each cauliflower, \$4.99 & silverbeet \$10/kg. Spinach was



Manaaki Whenua  
Landcare Research



# INSPIRING IMAGES

## Ecosystems Photography

Images • conversation to sustain Aotearoa



To the Spotlight

The common blue butterfly is one of 46 species of butterflies that breed in Aotearoa New Zealand. It may have been blown here, or it accidentally hitched a ride in turf imported from Australia. A few high-performing neoclassics often displace native species – a terrifying global game of ecological space invasion.

- 🔍 A pair of common blue butterflies (*Gloriosa superba*) mating.
- 📷 Noelle Bennett
- 📍 Kaitiaki Bay of Plenty, Marlborough



Woolly Bird's Nest Fungus

Bird's nest fungi are "decomposers" – the great recyclers that keep the world going. Without them dead plants would heap up everywhere and their nutrients would not be broken down to feed plants and animals coming after them. Blandings being the common bucket the bird's nest 1 propel the spore packet (egg) 1 up to 3 m from the nest.

- 🔍 Woolly bird's nest fungus (*Gyromyces*).
- 📷 Noelle Bennett
- 📍 Pelorus Bridge, Marlborough



Eye of the Hunter

Tomtits escape predation by falls and stoats when fenced reserves like Otago's Ecotourism near Dunedin. Reserves counter the problem of "tinking back" where we begin to accept the depleted ecosystems as "normal" rather than damaged. "Total" near. From the reserves will one day return birds like tomtits to our backyards.

- 🔍 Nightingale (South Island tomtit) (*Pipipi macrops*) hunting.
- 📷 Paul Somers
- 📍 Otago Ecotourism, Otago



'Allium aciculatum'

Allium aciculatum, an ornamental and culinary plant.

- 🔍 Allium aciculatum, an ornamental and culinary plant.
- 📷 Nicola Pyle
- 📍 Maple Glen Gardens, Wairarapa

Without fungi, there would be no soil to grow food. Most particles of mycelia, the thread-like structures of underground fungi, pass nutrients and water to plants, in return for receiving sugars. This enables trees to exchange "messages" and nutrients between each other, so a forest functions as a gigantic "super-organism".

Hare's foot fungus (*Coprinopsis lagopus*).

- 🔍 Hare's foot fungus (*Coprinopsis lagopus*).
- 📷 Noelle Bennett
- 📍 Waikanae, Marlborough



'Pohutukawa Perfection'

Pohutukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*) sometimes known as the "New Zealand Christmas Tree".

- 🔍 Pohutukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*) sometimes known as the "New Zealand Christmas Tree".
- 📷 Noelle Bennett
- 📍 Waikanae, Marlborough



'Family Dynamics'



# INSPIRING ART

Carisbrook School, South Dunedin



This is a workshop about what good choices we can make to grow biodiversity. Participants move between different visual 'inspiration stations' that introduce ideas of what might be possible to grow or establish (e.g. composting, predator trapping, raised beds, etc) and why (e.g. growing flowering plants like hebe, feta and salsola helps feed native birds). Multidimensional ideas are also introduced like how growing certain vegetables or herbs is not only healthy, economical, reduces food miles/carbon emissions and increases local resilience, but also is an expression of our identity - when we know the geographic and cultural history of those plants.



We help students make their own decisions about what they would most want to do to grow biodiversity. We help them express their choices visually using art. Primitivism is an interesting and non-confrontational way for those less artistically inclined for participants to explore visual symbols of choices they can make. Each student is given a window frame to fill with their choices from images representing what might be grown in their backyard to nature biodiversity. Using primitivism they construct an image of "what I would like to see out my back window" ... helping them, and their whānau, visualise what might be possible.





Figure 12. Meg Brasell-Jones, Kiosk wrap.

A further reciprocal benefit was gained from, not only working with and learning from others in this knowledgeable team but also from the public, who interacted with the various forms of visual communication design. The busy location of the mall was crucial for visibility and the installation attracted a broad cross-section of people that might not otherwise attend a specific event. Temporarily distracted from their shopping, people asked questions, wrote down their thoughts on leaves to hang on our tree, created artwork, shared gardening stories and pondered sublime photographs of our unique flora and fauna. They contributed to a digital book, a survey, a print-making workshop, made their own bird masks and many other activities. Present at workshops and the mall installation, Catriona, Jenny and I were not just researcher-creatives, we were also directly participating in science communication with the public, of all ages and backgrounds. This reaching out to others in the community, helped us to reinforce and instigate connections with people with both similar, and alternative ideas. A link to the annual NZISF gave the exhibition financial support and an established platform from which to engage with everyday people. This festival continues to be a valid way to connect humans and planet, in ways that benefit both. It also acts a vehicle to enable new relationships, which have the potential to benefit future collaborations.

Most importantly, the overall experience of the Backyard biodiversity | Manaakitanga te taiao project helped reconfirm for me that design sits in a complimentary space between science and art. And, that design acts as an important catalyst for creatively sharing knowledge and bringing about positive change in our society and natural environment. In a world exponentially impacted by modern civilisation, the sharing of knowledge and resources is crucial to restoring an equilibrium between planet and people. In fact, we critically require not only balance, but urgent restorative action to repair and replenish life of all kinds. With the aid of considered design, this can begin with a conversation and a seed in our own backyards.

Figures 9, 10 and 11. Meg Brasell-Jones, *Inspiring Gardeners*, 2023. A0 posters.

**Meg Brasell-Jones** (ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8065-3527>) is a principal lecturer in visual communication design at Te Maru Pūmanwa | College of Practice and Enterprise. Her research interest is in design, social responsibility and sustainable practice. She holds a Masters of Consumer and Applied Science (in Design Studies), a Bachelor of Arts (Art History and Theory), Postgraduate Diploma and Diploma for Graduates in Design Studies from the University of Otago, Diploma of Teaching from the Dunedin College of Education, Certificate in Adult Teaching from CPIT (Ara), a Graduate Diploma in Sustainable Practice, and a Certificate in Te Mata a Ao Māori from Otago Polytechnic. Meg is particularly interested in creating, and facilitating the making of, meaningful design for a more positive, regenerative future.

**Catriona MacLeod** is a Senior Researcher at Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research. Her research focuses on conservation ecology, drawing on functional ecology to deliver strong fundamental advances as well as applied solutions to better inform environmental policy and management decisions. Catriona proactively seeks a collective action approach, incorporating te ao Māori, to resolve complex socio-environmental challenges for the benefit of all New Zealanders and Aotearoa's environment. This often requires working at the interface of multiple disciplines, but also draws on her strong quantitative skills and expertise in environmental monitoring and reporting, which she has developed working across a range of biomes.

**Dr Jenny Rock** is a researcher/practitioner/teacher in the transdisciplinary space between science and the arts and humanities. She holds a BA in Human Ecology, PhD in the Biological Sciences and has completed postgraduate work in the Visual Arts. As a biologist she has researched widely on the effects of environmental change, often on temperature adaptation. As an ecologically-focused printmaker her work has appeared in international exhibitions, as well as within/on covers of science, art and humanities journals and texts. She lectures in diverse aspects of science communication, as well as community-based conservation management, and ArtScience - specifically a course 'Seeing Ecology through Arts Practice'. Much of her transdisciplinary work focuses on place-based research in community social arts practice for socio-environmental decision making. Although based mostly on the Otago Peninsula, she currently holds research fellow or adjunct faculty positions with the University of Otago, the University Centre of the Westfjords (Ísafjörður, Iceland); and College of the Atlantic (Maine, USA).

1 Victor Papanek, *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1972), 13.

2 Victor Papanek, *The Green Imperative: Ecology and Ethics in Design and Architecture* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 9.

## MAPPING THE ARTS AND FASHION ENVIRONMENT IN ŌTEPOTI DUNEDIN

Martin Kean

When visitors take a walk around Ōtepoti Dunedin for the first time, they become interested in the architecture, the hum of the city, the hidden gems. They watch performances or listen to music and they discover fashion outlets, art galleries and places to eat and drink. Navigating between these locations in Google Maps or Bing Maps can be difficult. The following project suggests a simpler topology to interested readers and people who walk around looking at things. These 'people who walk around looking at things' I define as *wanderers*. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word *wander* to mean "to move without purpose or specified destination; to roam."<sup>1</sup>

*A Guide to Arts and Fashion in Ōtepoti Dunedin* is a printed map, and a corresponding online website – both are handy accessible guides, as one fits in a pocket or bag, the other fits on a phone. The printed guide folded out is an A4 sheet. Folded up, it is almost a square shape at 100mm x 105mm. Its small size makes a handy fit for a pocket or purse. The publication is a biennial survey of Dunedin-based cultural and retail communities: fashion makers, fashion stores, art galleries, book shops, cafes and libraries. As such it aims to be a useful resource for wanderers — visitors and locals alike. Recycled, upcycled, second-hand and vintage stores are also listed. The collection of sites in some small way counters the effects of fast fashion, while revealing a genuinely beneficial local fashion retail environment. Design stores are also listed. The inclusion of museums, galleries, cafes, and bars gives readers and wanderers places to stop during their walking journey, opportunities to refresh before continuing along their personal trails of discovery.

The guides are intended as walking maps, in that a wanderer may hold it comfortably in one hand while walking and looking around. The online equivalent, a phone-sized website that emulates the printed map, is accessible from a QR code printed on the paper map and contains more up-to-date information than its printed sister.

The idea for a guide to, or map of, arts and fashion in Dunedin originated with the f\*INK Map, an extension of the f\*INK Weekly Entertainment Guide, both conceived by Caro McCaw, published from 1996 to 2009. The first f\*INK map was hand-illustrated by Stefan Neville, and mapped locations of venues listed in the weekly printed entertainment guide. The guide to arts and fashion in Ōtepoti Dunedin became an expansion of this, and has been published regularly since 2003, making the 2023 edition a two-decade anniversary. Seen over time, the guide showcases the cultural ecology of the city. As a printed work it must be updated periodically as businesses change, move, appear, and disappear. Editions of this publication show a changing landscape of fashion and arts retail industries within the city over two decades.



Figure 1. *A Guide to art+ fashion Ōtepoti Dunedin*, 2023, cover design Toby Eglesfield.

The base map used in the printed edition of this project is derived from a Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) dataset. The dataset is provided free for use — from the LINZ website: “almost all data from the LINZ Data Service is provided under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence.”<sup>2</sup> The printed map utilises ‘shape’ or vector-based files downloaded from the LINZ dataset, converted for further design within Adobe Illustrator. LINZ was established in 1996 following the disestablishment of the Department of Lands and Surveys, the government department tasked with surveying and mapping New Zealand’s land features and coastline, along with management and administration. The printed version of the map incorporates the Māori place name Ōwheo for the river Water of Leith, and Ōtepoti as the commonly used Māori name for the location of the city of Dunedin, based on the name Ōtepoti, the site of an old tauraka waka (waka landing site).<sup>3,4</sup>

The online version of the guide uses OpenStreetMap as the basis for the map, with tiles, typography, colours and layers customised via Mapbox. The HTML, CSS and JavaScript files reside in a GitHub repository, and the site is deployed via Netlify to the domain [creativedunedin.co.nz](http://creativedunedin.co.nz). OpenStreetMap uses various sources for its base map, including contributions from local volunteers, and LINZ data. The process of importing LINZ base map data into OpenStreetMap began in 2011 and is continuing throughout 2024 with the ongoing import of streets, buildings and location addresses. LINZ has given public permission to use its LINZ data under a CC-BY licence, back-dated to 2008.<sup>5</sup>

The western/European cartographic history of Aotearoa New Zealand began in the mid 17th century with the arrival of Abel Tasman and continued through to the 1800s with triangulation and geodetic surveying. From the early 2000s global positioning system (GPS) data augmented the LINZ data sets. The classic LINZ Topo50 maps, used by trampers, hunters and outdoor enthusiasts, are now available in vector formats.

The kaupapa of this map, however, is found at an intersection of culture and cartography. The publication is a city map, a thematic map designed to allow wanderers to quickly orient themselves to the inner-city urban area. The typefaces used are derived from sans-serif typeface design, chosen to reduce clutter, and to create space within the surface of the page. Swiss typeface designer Adrian Frutiger once remarked that “typography must be as beautiful as a forest, not like the concrete jungle of the tenements. It gives distance between the trees, the room to breathe and allow for life.”<sup>6</sup> In these maps the typographic elements aim to make room for both space and relevant arts and culture locations, to guide readers and wanderers, and yet allow opportunities for their own exploration.

The businesses located on the map are local, there are no chain stores or franchises included, which in turn indicates that the owners are residents, invested in locality. The choice of mapped locations is an opinionated selection, not every business or public building is located, rather, consideration is given to what the map designer would like to see.

The bright colour palette in the 2023 edition was derived from the design for the cover, by local designer and animator Toby Eglesfield. The colours were chosen to create a high-contrast colour palette for visibility and accessibility.

Rhiannon Firth, writing about critical cartography, suggests that maps embody power relations,<sup>7</sup> and in this guide, the editors’ curated selections attempt to take an imagined list of shops and services and map their locations on a landscape, exposing an opinionated topology of needs, that connect community members, designers, retailers shoppers, explorers and wanderers. In this sense the map’s designers, the map itself, and the map’s readers work together, to create a knowledge network.

Gloria Lanci discusses the concept of ‘translation’ in urban art maps, the notion that maps, as a form of art, are expressions to communicate and convey meaning.<sup>8</sup> Here, the map’s intention is that of exposing and sharing connected communities with the map graphically illustrating a network of practitioner, gallery and retailer-based experiences. The map is a small artwork in itself, a shiny thing to use, and show to others, a collectible.

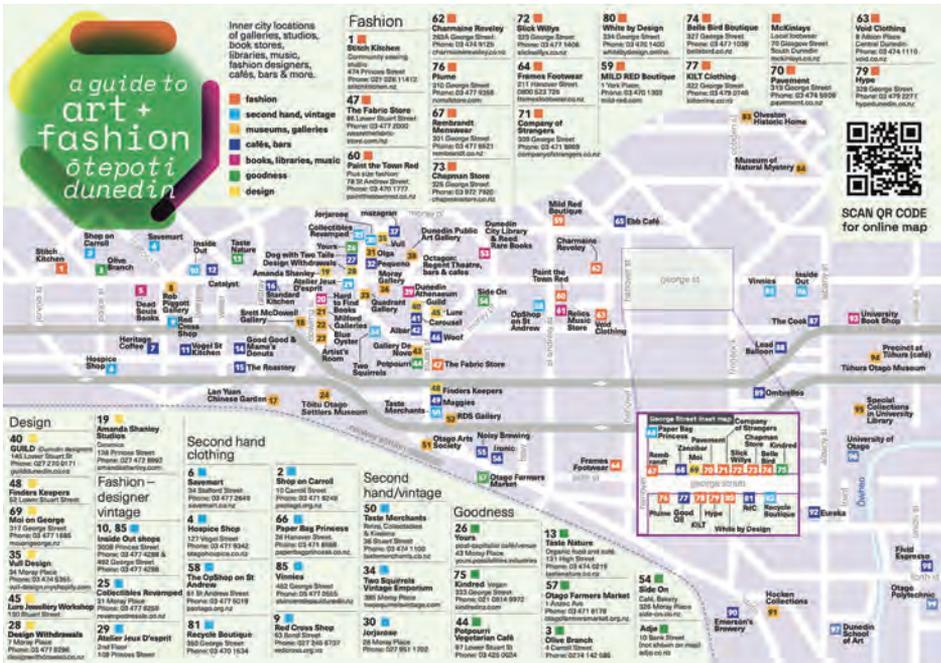


Figure 2. A Guide to art+ fashion Ōtepoti Dunedin, 2023.



Figure 3. A Guide to Arts & Fashion in Dunedin, 2021, cover design Denise Narciso.

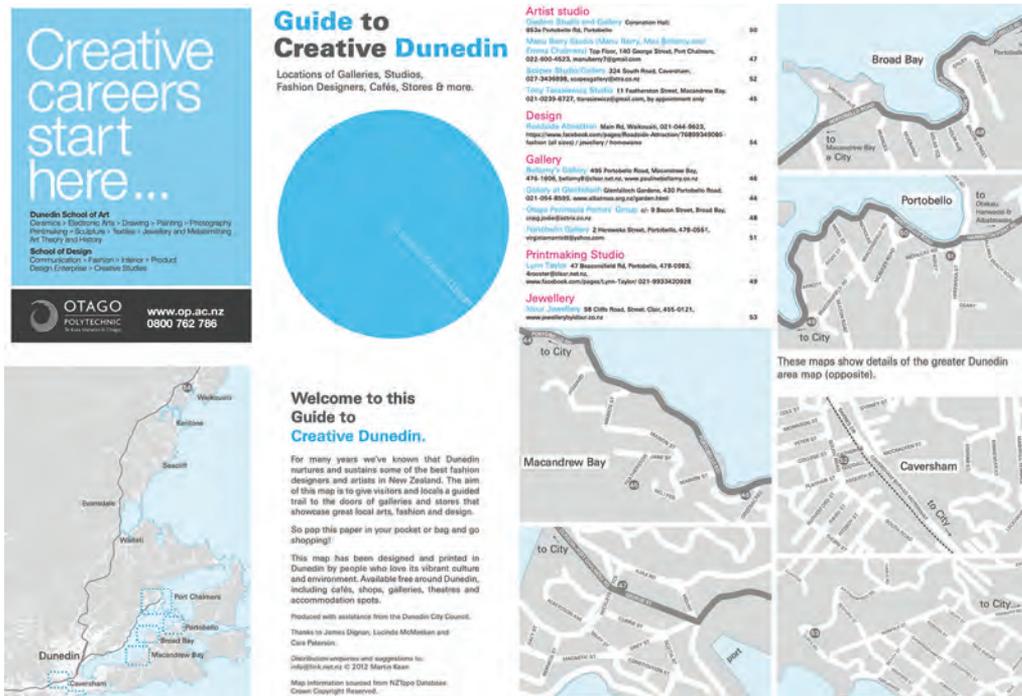


Figure 4. Guide to Creative Dunedin, 2012, cover design Lucinda McMeeken.

The online version of the map provides an alternative to the printed paper map. It is easier to update, as the updating requires only editing the web pages, so the online map is often the most up-to-date version. The online map is not constrained by page edges, so many locations are mapped beyond the geospatial limitations of the printed map, extending to regions of Otago Peninsula and South Dunedin. In this way, the printed paper map can only be an introduction to the mapped landscape of the walkable centre of the arts and fashion in Ōtepoti, while the broader online map functions as a persistent snapshot of current and further-flung locations. However, the paper map may be seen as more relevant in the presence of overwhelming digital alternatives, such as Google Maps and Bing Maps. While Google Maps offers the ability to add opening hours, contact details, and photos to the listings of individual sites, these paper-based maps and guides offer the attraction of discoverability, event-based distribution, and the opportunity to engage with a surface that is bigger than a mobile phone.

How does this work help to shape community? The power of illustrating the city's cultural neighbourhoods is to identify the city's cultural assets, defining and supporting visitor experiences of the cultural landscape within the city. Retailers have reported visitors and wanderers saying they are "on a trail" and "continuing a journey of all the shops, galleries and museums", which suggests a connectedness, and proximal linkages between locations.

To conclude, I welcome you to pick up 'A Guide to Arts and Fashion in Ōtepoti Dunedin' and set out on your own path of discovery. If you are not currently in Ōtepoti Dunedin you might prefer to visit the guide online, here: <https://createdunedin.co.nz/>



Figure 5. Arts & Fashion in Dunedin, 2006, design Aimee Glensor.

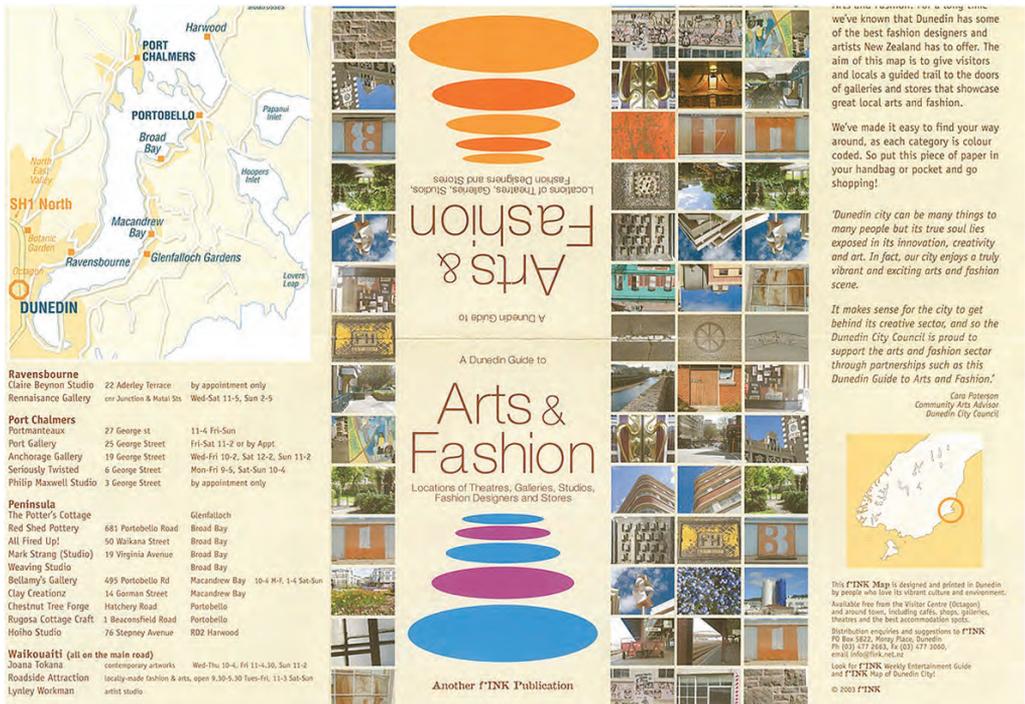


Figure 6. A Dunedin Guide to Arts & Fashion, 2003, cover design Aimee Glensor.

## Acknowledgements

Many designers, musicians and artists have worked on and contributed to editions of this publication over the years 2003, 2006, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2019, 2021 and 2023, including Prof Caro McCaw, Meg Brasell-Jones, Aimee Glensor, Donald McPherson, Cara Paterson, Lucinda McMeeken, James Dignan, Denise Narciso, Tracy Kennedy, Toby Eglesfield, and Prof Margo Barton.

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- 1 Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "wander (v), sense 1.1.a," June 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9504043607>.
- 2 Use of CC BY 4.0 licensed data in OpenStreetMap, <https://blog.openstreetmap.org/2017/03/17/use-of-cc-by-data/>, accessed 26 May 2024.
- 3 Ngāi Tahu Atlas Kā Huru Manu, <https://kahurumanu.co.nz/atlas/>, accessed 26 May 2024.
- 4 Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Maori (1989) Ngai Tahu 1880. H K Taiaroa. (Unpublished typescript) [English translation of two original notebooks in Te Reo Maori of place names related to mahinga kai compiled by H K Taiaroa in 1880 from information provided by Ngai Tahu informants]. Ngai Tahu Archive. Collection 140. Item D301, Box 102, D. Wai-27. Wai-27 Doc – R30 – Book "Ngai Tahu 1880." Macmillan Brown Library Archives Collection, 89.
- 5 Open Street Map LINZ data import, [https://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/LINZ#Status\\_@\\_March\\_2024](https://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/LINZ#Status_@_March_2024), accessed 26 May 2024.
- 6 Adrian Frutiger quote, <https://www.joshuadeakin.co.uk/work/adrian-frutiger/>, accessed 11 June 2024.
- 7 R Firth, . Critical Cartography. *The Occupied Times*, 2015, <https://theoccupiedtimes.org/?p=13771>
- 8 Lanci, G. (2022). *Urban Art Maps in Cultural Context*. In: *Art Maps and Cities*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13306-0\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13306-0_2)

## THE ŌTEPOTI ECO-GOTHIC: TRENDING TOWARDS AN ENTANGLED AWARENESS

Sarah McGaughran

I follow the undulating path of a river, each step taking my body further away from my car and its ties to the city, and further into the dense native forest. There is no gentle transition into conservation land – on one side of the asphalt road green paddocks dotted with cows stretch as far as the eye can see, on the other a wire fence which contains the Fiordland National Park. The animals pay no mind to these human distinctions – the groans of deer echo out of the bush, a pair of kea bathe in a farmland stream, and a family of Canadian geese take respite on a pond after a long migration. A triplet of wild goats bounce onto the road in front of my car, and a hawk makes off with a roadkill possum. I observe these interactions between the human-made environment and wild species with a mild curiosity.

In rural Aotearoa, these moments of cross-pollination between worlds happen so frequently that they become ordinary. Recently, I have noticed a rising trend of artists in Ōtepoti and across Aotearoa who are exploring the relationship between themselves and the environment, and interspecies entanglements at large. I have begun to wonder about the origins of this trend. One could start at the beginning of the colonial era, where the sublime infiltrated early painters' landscapes, presenting the damp, wild landscape as tame and idyllic. Fast-forward a century or so, and we continue to see these idealised depictions – in Colin McCahon's paintings, for example, or another 50 years later in Imogen Taylor's queer reimagination of New Zealand regionalist and cubist movements during her time as a Frances Hodgkins Fellow in 2019.<sup>1</sup>

In 2015, Jasmine Gallagher published an article in *The Pantograph Punch*, "Christchurch, and the Heart of the Antipodean Gothic." Gallagher writes that "the idea of the Antipodes was, and still is, one of outsiders, as opposed to insiders; of isolation, as opposed to integration; of the antimodern, as opposed to the modern; and especially, one of nature and the organic, as opposed to culture and the reflexively constructed."<sup>2</sup> The term "eco-gothic," which I have coined for this essay, stems from this notion of the Antipodean Gothic, satirised in Robert Leonard's 2008 essay "Hello Darkness: New Zealand Gothic,"<sup>3</sup> which describes the genre's beginnings in the early 1990s (although elements of the genre are notably present much earlier than this).

While it is certainly true that the *idea* of the Antipodes sets nature and the organic in opposition to culture, the reality of Antipodean life is that the organic and the constructed grate uncomfortably against each other. In Ōtepoti we see weeds that sprout defiantly from cracks in resolute nineteenth-century stone architecture; town belts that slice through the suburban sprawl; a Botanic Garden that blossoms next to the streets of Studentville, blanketed with broken glass and the abandoned carcasses of burned couches. The tensions between death and beauty, ebullience and misery are central to the gothic genre. The New Zealand Gothic relays the discomfort of a country with a dark colonial past in a setting of undeniable beauty. Today, our contemporary artists are wrestling with a bloody history amid a climate crisis, ruminating upon how that very history led us to the brink of catastrophe. This is where the ecological aspect enters the equation, forming the eco-gothic – a genre formed within the darkness of gothic sensibilities combined with the horror of impending ecological collapse.

My own practice began, as it does for many young artists, with an exploration of the self. For me, this exploration remained within the bodily horizon until corporeal and psychological experience deemed it necessary to move

outside my own physical boundaries. The smooth, unaltered depictions of my flesh became fragmented, noded, marred and abstracted as my personal world, and the world at large, shifted and fractured. In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett presents the eloquent argument that “to begin to *experience* the relationship between persons and other materialities more horizontally, is to take a step towards a more ecological sensibility.”<sup>14</sup> I found guidance in the natural world, in the ability of ecosystems to adapt to change, to forest fire, to landslips and to industrial processes. The boundary of the self-dissolved, as I began to view myself as embedded within, rather than governing over, these natural processes. In my work, *Dea matrona*, which was presented in “SITE 2023” at the Dunedin School of Art, this process of personal fracturing, ecological collaboration, decomposition and new growth was explored through a mountain of flesh with weeds sprouting from apertures in the latex skin, which was dumped in the middle of the clean white gallery space.



Figure 1. Sarah McGaughran, *Dea matrona*, 2023, latex, soil, steel, weeds, in “SITE: 2023,” Dunedin School of Art, Ōtepoti Dunedin. Photograph: artist’s own.

In my recent works, I bind ecosystems of soil in permeable sacs of latex and leave them to carry on their closed loops of nutrient cycling. Growth, decay and decomposition take place over months, sprouting oxalis one month, which inevitably dies back and allows a new species to take hold. These works are called *Haggis*, for the form itself, and the action of stuffing a skin-like sac with soil. Each time a plant dies, or drops its leaves, I feed it back into the body of the haggis to recycle the nutrients back into the system. The only input into these systems is the addition of sunlight and water, which escapes through evaporation and uptake by the plants.

Recently, one of the works sprouted a metre long sycamore sapling, which has since begun to decay. I cannot help but see myself in these works, in that hopeful moment of flourishing. Despite my better judgement, I imagined an entire tree growing out of the small body of soil at its base. However, with only so many nutrients available, such wondrous growth was impossible for the sapling. There is both grief and acceptance that comes with each of these cycles of growth, death and decay. Grief at the loss of something both hoped for and expected, and acceptance of this loss as something necessary for the ecosystem. In the ecosystem of the self, these moments of hopeful

flourishing followed by inevitable loss or change are also met with a similar kind of grief and acceptance. The meter of time brings with it an understanding that the loss of something feeds into new growth, allowing space for an entirely different kind of sprouting, if only one has the patience and trust to let these processes play out.

I walk through the Dunedin Botanic Gardens with my dear friend, and local artist, Lucy Hill. Hill's practice is unlike any that I have come across – it's both difficult to describe and to pin down. In her 2023 exhibition with Yana Dombrowsky-M'Baye and Taarn Scott, "Pieces Spaces Species," at the Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Hill pressed clay into the cracks and unseen spaces of the gallery, both in the interior and in the carpark behind the space.<sup>5</sup> Bodily gesture is ever-present in Hill's work – the gesture of moving through the world on foot, noticing the unnoticed; the gesture of manipulating clay; the gesture of tossing hand-made seed bombs into forgotten and untended gardens that dot her daily walks. Movement runs as a central thread through everything she does – our conversations take place within this movement, usually walking, sometimes swimming; even while seated we usually occupy our bodies with drawing, so our minds can connect. I tell her of my research into ecological artists in Ōtepoti, and my difficulty in unearthing the foundations that underpin our collective practices. There is a lamenting quality that echoes throughout all these artists' works. A deep, mournful cry of something either already, or about to be, lost. This is the state of any ecologically sensitive individual in the Anthropocene.

Our conversation shifts towards technology, and the unintended side-effects of its use. As we gaze towards the Leith Valley, Hill wonders how anyone could not care about the world we are losing, the beautiful wisdom of ancient forests. We agree that technology aids in the ecological apathy of the masses, pulling focus away from the destruction that is so visible to anyone who chooses to see it.<sup>6</sup> As we sit on a sun-drenched bench, with tūi and kererū swooping between the trees that encircle us, Miranda Bellamy and Amanda Fauteux emerge from one of the paths that connects to the clearing where we rest.



Figure 2. Lucy Hill, *210*, 2023, clay-dyed muslin, sticks, cotton, seaweed, Ōpoho Road clay, Black's Road clay, found materials. Exhibited in "Pieces Spaces Species," Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Ōtepoti Dunedin. Photograph: Lindsey de Roos, <https://blueoyster.org.nz/exhibitions/pieces-spaces-species/> (accessed 29 April 2024).

Working as a collaborative duo, Miranda Bellamy and Amanda Fauteux present an alternative to my admission of technology as being wholly destructive. Their works often use technology as an interface between natural phenomena and the audience. In their installation, *Stone Moves*, at Tāhuna Queenstown's Te Atamira gallery, the duo used a four-channel audio installation to present soundscapes recorded from the electrical microcurrents of leaves.<sup>7</sup> I think of this use of technology as a translation device, transcribing the hidden messages of vegetal matter into the aseptic language of sound. Bellamy and Fauteux create a softening of the anthropocentric horizon, allowing audiences to embrace the kinship of their surrounds.

My first encounter with the couple's work was at the Blue Oyster Art Project Space in 2021, with their work *Radiata*.<sup>8</sup> Bellamy and Fauteux placed a pine tree into the sterile ecosystem of the gallery space. The tree had been processed as it would be for construction – sliced into straight lengths suitable for building – yet was reconstructed into its whole for its life in the gallery. The straight lines that segment the organic form of the trunk reminds me of the way heteronormative culture segments queer lives. In Sara Ahmed's essay "Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology," the author argues that queer lives intersect heteronormative culture at an angle, thus only interacting with "straight space" momentarily before continuing into the rest of space.<sup>9</sup> Over coffee in Bellamy and Fauteux's studio, I ask them about the queerness of nature itself. I argue that the entangled, entwined and multi-layered interactions of nature align with the queer world view. Bellamy makes the astute observation that heteronormativity is an artificial framework that is placed upon the organic, and thus nature itself is not queer; but appears so from the lens of the hegemonic society.<sup>10</sup> I like this frameshift, that I, as a queer person, am not the outlier; that I do not intersect straight society as Ahmed argues, but rather I exist in my organic form and struggle against a heteronormative framework placed upon my life. This is what I see in *Radiata* – an organic body with a grid of heteronormativity placed upon it.



Figure 3. Miranda Bellamy and Amanda Fauteux, *Radiata*, 2021, *Pinus radiata*, 6200×1500mm.  
Exhibited in Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Ōtepoti, Dunedin,  
<https://www.amandafauteux.com/2021/08/27/radiata/> (accessed 29 April 2024).

The more I search for the foundations of the trend of the eco-gothic artist, the more I become distracted by the history of our collective practices. Amanda Fauteux grew up in one of the most polluted cities in the world, Sudbury, Canada; Miranda Bellamy was raised here in Ōtepoti; Lucy Hill calls the mustardy hills of Diamond Harbour on Banks Peninsula home; and I come from the small town of Waimate in South Canterbury, but call Ōtepoti home. Each of us come from places where the natural world has been altered by the industrial in ways visible within our lifetimes, and thus it makes sense that our works lament these changes or, at the very least, that these changes form a foundation for our work today. The congregation of our lives here in Ōtepoti is mere coincidence, supported by a small, tight-knit community that supports the arts, despite the capitalist pressures that continuously endanger our creative spaces. We are artists who yearn for reconnection with our organic kin. Our works serve as a translatory device between what we can decipher from our environments and relay to our audiences. It really is quite simple – each of us desire lives in which we have the space and permission to convene with nature, to listen, to observe and to pass the knowledge gained from these experiences to our communities.

### Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Lucy Hill, Miranda Bellamy and Amanda Fauteux for taking the time to share their perspectives and wisdom for this piece. Many thanks to Amy Walsh and Wesley John Fourie for lending their eyes and minds to the edit.

**Sarah McGaughran** is an Ōtepoti-based interdisciplinary artist who works across painting, sculpture, sound and writing. Their practice is concerned with the entanglement of the body with the surrounding environment, seen through the lens of queer experience. They graduated from the University of Otago in 2016 with a Bachelor of Science in biochemistry before completing a Graduate Diploma of Visual Arts in 2022 and a Bachelor of Visual Arts (Honours) with First Class Honours from the Dunedin School of Art in 2023. Sarah McGaughran has been presenting their sound work under the moniker Perry Buoy since 2016, performing with local and international artists in projects including the Dunedin Fringe Festival and Beth Hilton's *Pyhrra* at the Audio Foundation in 2020. McGaughran has recently exhibited their work in "Anhedonia" at New Lands. Gallery and Project Space, alongside local painter Eliza Glyn, and is the founder and director of the artist-run Slant Art Project Space.

- 1 Imogen Taylor, *Sapphic Fragments*, 2020, Hocken Collections, Ōtepoti Dunedin.
- 2 Jasmine Gallagher, "Christchurch, and the Heart of the Antipodean Gothic," *The Pantograph Punch*, 2015, <https://www.pantograph-punch.com/posts/christchurch-antipodean-gothic> (accessed 6 July 2024).
- 3 Robert Leonard, "Hello Darkness: New Zealand Gothic," *Art and Australia* (Spring 2008).
- 4 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2010).
- 5 Lucy Hill, Taarn Scott and Yana Dombrowsky-M'Baye, "Pieces Spaces Species," 2023, exhibition in Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Ōtepoti Dunedin.
- 6 Lucy Hill in conversation with the author; Ōtepoti Dunedin, April 2024
- 7 Miranda Bellamy and Amanda Fauteux, *Stone Moves*, 2023, schist and 4-channel audio installation. Exhibited in Te Atamira, Tāhuna Queenstown.
- 8 Miranda Bellamy and Amanda Fauteux, *Radiata*, 2021, Pinus radiata, 6200 x 1500. Exhibited in Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Ōtepoti Dunedin.
- 9 Sarah Ahmed, "Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 12:2 (2006), 543–74.
- 10 Miranda Bellamy in conversation with the author; Ōtepoti Dunedin, April 2024.

## EXPLORATIONS IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Jeanne Claire Dubois

### INTRODUCTION

In 2023, I left France to travel in Aotearoa New Zealand for my first international artist residency. My trip, on a working holiday visa, lasted nine months and was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, which I fully embraced. As a ceramist and artist from France, my goal was to research and work with clays from Aotearoa New Zealand as a means of exploring Aotearoa's unique diversity and geology, with respect to its land and people. Working with materials from the land is a unique way to experience the endemic geology from the perspective of the mind, heart and the sacredness of the whenua. From my encounters, I found a way of reciprocating and giving something back in return.

I was interested in seeing the last art school in Aotearoa with a full ceramics studio department, so I visited Ōtepoti Dunedin on one of the Dunedin School of Art's open days. There I met Rob Cloughley and introduced him to my art practice and collaborations with scientists, including those done in the Louvre Lab in Paris.

In France, I worked at the ceramic research lab in the Louvre known as the C2RMF (Centre de recherche et de restauration des musées de France/ The National Centre for Research and Restoration in French Museums). My research involved a ceramist from the Renaissance period, Bernard Palissy (1510–90). My role was to prepare the clays, analysed and collected as Palissy would have done more than four hundred years ago, and try and discover how he created his fine marbled patterns.

Employed as a ceramist by Catherine de' Medici, Palissy was commissioned to create a grotto cave covered with ceramic shells, leaves and animals (including snakes) for the Tuileries Gardens of the Louvre. A writer and researcher as well as a ceramist, Palissy crushed any material he could to create his own distinctive white glazes; he was also a figure of legend as the man who burnt his own furniture to finish his wood firing. I found a parallel in Aotearoa with Len Castle (1924–2011), who started making marbled clays during World War II, often with explosive results.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of my interest in Castle, I wondered how different the clays and sands were in Aotearoa from those in France and how they would combine and marble together.

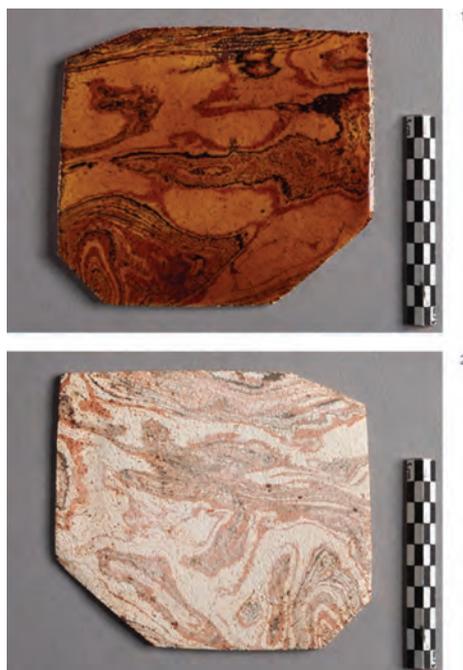
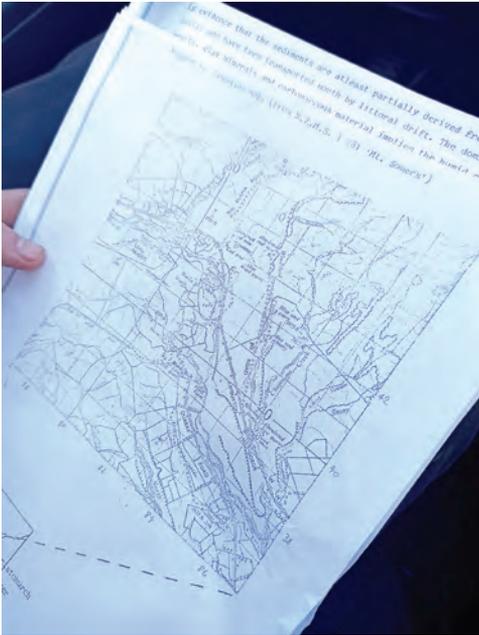


Figure 1. Recreation of marbled clays in C2RMF, Louvre Lab, Paris, 2017.



Figures 2. Mount Somers.

Clays are formed from decomposed rocks from mountains, as in the Southern Alps in Aotearoa, and are created by tectonic activity along faultlines. Thus, each clay deposit is unique in terms of its volcanic origin. I had never experienced such active geology before visiting Aotearoa. The clays (uku) one finds in the wild here include different sand types drawn from the variety of coloured sands found around the coasts. Drawing on this unique diversity, I experimented in order to discover how local clays and sands would react with heat and fire. I also wanted to find out how uku and the tiny sand grains I had collected look under a microscope before and after firing, and with glaze added.

With Rob Cloughley's assistance, I applied for a DSA residency and made valuable contacts that enabled me to learn about clays from Aotearoa, their origins, locations and uses. I contacted Paddy Ferris, a former DSA student who was creating clay recipes for the Temuka Pottery factory, making ceramic insulators for electric pylons with local clays, including Kakahu and Mt Somers Te Kiekie clay. When I visited the factory, I was amazed to observe the lightning tests used to prove the capacity of each ceramic insulator to be lightning proof. What an adrenaline shot that was!

I started to discover the rich story of clays in the Canterbury area, where I was staying. Clays have been dug from the Kakahu deposits near Geraldine since the 1860s and kilns have been firing the local clay into various products in Temuka since 1868, including tiles, bricks, tableware and porcelain electrical components. I learned that Temuka was the only large-scale producer of ceramic kitchenware remaining in New Zealand and now the sole producer of ceramic insulators.

Thanks to Paddy, who became a great friend, together we found and collected small amounts of Mt Somers Te Kiekie clay close to the historic potters' quarry: "Where you can see limestone and coal there is surely clay," he taught me. I was amazed to see how plastic this orange-brown clay was, straight from the ground. This plasticity comes from the area's unique geology. Volcanic activity 98 million years BP (before present) formed rhyolite, the most silica-rich of volcanic rocks, silica being an important component of clay. Through subtropical weathering, it formed as a primary clay around 90–40 million years BP. The sea formed a deposition of marginal sands, followed by the compression and uplift of the area during a period of glaciation that created lava patterns still visible from the valley.<sup>2</sup>

Acting on Rob's recommendation, I met Tatyanna Meharry in her studio in Ōtautahi Christchurch and viewed the hundreds of samples of clays and sands she had collected in Aotearoa, mostly around the South Island and especially in Canterbury.<sup>3</sup> Creating ceramics with local uku clay, she always asked permission from Maori representatives to collect these materials. Tatyanna kindly shared her knowledge and showed me four particular clays she had found herself: white Kakahu, Charleston, Bathurst and Glentui.

The latter, Glentui, I found myself at Greymouth Māwhera along the coast road during a two-week road trip around the South Island. I travelled from Ōtautahi Christchurch to Arthur's Pass, the West Coast to Tasman Bay, then the East Coast down south to Ōtepoti Dunedin. On this trip I collected 16 different samples of sands, small quantities dated and organised by chronological order of collecting using the same method. Collecting each sample, I bore in mind the sacredness of the land, making a small prayer with gratitude. I picked up any rubbish as I went along, to thank nature for these gifts. I also collected shells, kuku (mussels) and triangle clams as a memory of these encounters. Finding a connection between time and place was a joy; walking barefoot on the beach looking at shells reminded me powerfully of the beaches of my birthplace in Normandy, France.

## TE WAIPOUNAMU IN THREE PARTS

In what follows, I share my experience of Te Waipounamu in three parts.

First, I share photographs from my trips and the places where I collected the clays, sands and shells. Second, I discuss the shaping process for clays and sands, using 31 rulers as shrinking tests; measurements of their reaction to the drying process and firing effects on the clays on their own, then marbled together; making marbled shell shapes as a tribute to Palissy; and creating 73 shell forms as a support for sand glaze tests. The third part reports a collaboration with the Geology Department at Otago University; I worked with Marshall Palmer and Sophie White to create images of uku and sands from the microscope.



Figure 3. Map of Te Waipounamu and collected sands.



Figure 4. Sands (in chronological order of collecting): Hokitika, Franz Joseph, Greymouth, Westport, Tasman Bay, Motupipi, Havelock, Clifford Bay, Kekerengu, Kaikoura, Gore Bay, Ōtautahi Christchurch, Oamaru, Moeraki, Long Beach, Aramoana.

I. Photographs of trips



Figure 5. Kekerengu



Figure 6. Kakahu

## 2. Observing and creating with uku clays and sands

To experiment with the various uku and sands I needed to prepare them carefully and devise a method of identifying them during the collection process, taking note of their specific qualities. All my findings were kept in a notebook and shared in a second notebook as a gift for the students I worked with.

Arriving at the residency in Ōtepoti, I first allowed the sands to air-dry so that they would retain their mineral content. In the ceramic workshop I made the uku homogeneous using the same process. I put the same amount of clay and water, sifted with an 80 mesh sieve, into buckets. Using the sieve, I could put aside larger pieces that might explode with the heat from the firing; I decided to crush them with the grinding bowl and include them in the glaze tests.

Preparing clays required the utmost patience, especially marbling them together. For different clays to combine they need to be plastic, malleable and dry, and shrink together smoothly enough not to break apart with firing.

When preparing a clay mix, the longer you leave it the more plastic it will become. As I wanted to experience the clays with their own natural properties intact as much as possible, I left them in water for a few days – best practice is to immerse them for weeks. I used a plaster surface layer to absorb the excess water and form balls of clay, which were then kept in wet tissue or plastic in an airtight bucket. To quicken the process, one can include different materials like bentonite that make the clay more acidic, but I was mindful of my challenge to myself to use only found materials from Aotearoa as much as possible.

Each clay used was specific in composition and colour and reacts differently when manipulating it. Charleston clay was full of shiny crystals of mica (often used for makeup) and very brittle, so I added two scoops of bentonite, which was a helpful technique here, and also with the Greymouth Māwhera clay. Even though the Charleston clay was hard to use, I loved seeing the mica particles shining with the light; as I manipulated the clay it made my hands sparkle. The white Kakahu clay was plastic to start with, like the orange–caramel Glentui clay or the dark-grey Bathurst clay, but it was hard to sieve with its inclusions of coal fragments.

### The Shrinking Tests

With the clays ready, I wanted to see how the various uku reacted to the drying and firing process, first with the six clays themselves, then with combinations of these clays, creating 31 different rulers to use as shrinking tests. To shape my samples, I utilised the only tool I had brought from France, a small metal ruler that had belonged to my grandfather, a carpenter. I made a 10cm mark on two identical clay body rulers which were measured when dried, then fired in two different kilns: one electric (1215°C, cone 6) and one gas (1285°C, cone 10). The required temperature is higher in a gas firing and oxygen levels are reduced, sometimes resulting in the uku melting to some degree. The results were somewhat surprising, with some clays melting to such an extent that their inscribed numbers and names disappeared and it became a puzzle to recognise them.



Figure 7. Shrink tests.

## The Marbled Shells

As a tribute to Bernard Palissy, each marbled clay sample used for the rulers was sculpted into the shape of shells I had collected around the South Island. I used Palissy's method of making plaster moulds so as to make an imprint of the kuku and triangle clams I had found, preserving details of shell textures and pressing the uku into the moulds. Using plaster moulds helps the clays to meld together, suggesting a parallel with the geologic movements that formed them. Making the most I could of this repetitive process, I created unique marbling effects on each piece. To reveal the marbled patterns, I used a transparent glaze from the ceramic studio which was very effective in giving the shells a 'wet' look and thus a more realistic effect.



Figure 8. Marbled shells.

## Glaze Tests

As sand contains silica, which is a component of both clay and glaze, I tested the first 16 sand samples collected around the South Island with a transparent glaze. First testing each sample individually, then combinations of them, I created 73 shell forms as records of their reaction to the firings. I was surprised to see how the sands in the transparent glaze created a natural green or 'celadon' effect in the gas firing. The ability of these sands to create these metallic effects, thanks to the heavier material within them, inspired me to observe them under a microscope.

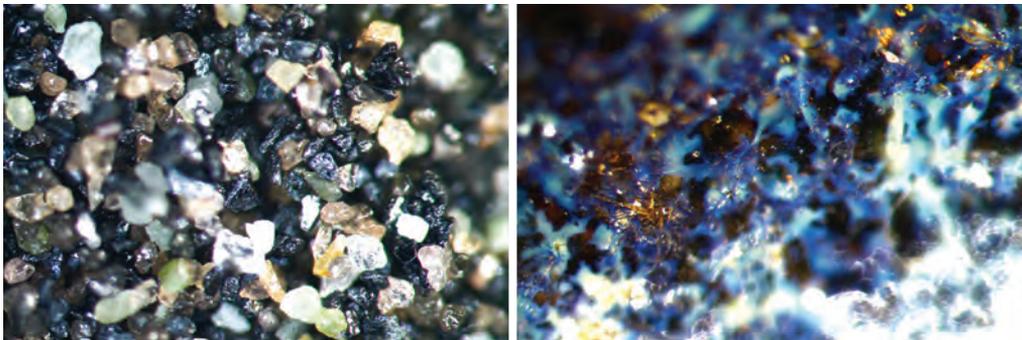


Figure 9. Westport sand, Westport sand glaze.

### 3. Images of inner worlds – a collaboration with the Otago University Geology Department

During my road trip along the beaches of Aotearoa I saw dark sands, or layers of coloured sands, for the first time. This variety derives from their composition, their geological formation. I am grateful to Marshall Palmer and Sophie White for their time and for welcoming me to the Geology Department and Geology Museum at Otago University, where I was able to create images of the uku and sands I had collected around the South Island using a stereomicroscope. Through these images I was able to enter a new world.

The microscope helped us perceive a variety of textures and colours in crystals invisible to the naked eye, including, sadly, a fibre of micro-plastic lodged in clay as a reminder of the omnipresence of plastic due to our 'consumption industry' and one sign of the fragility of our ecosystem. Flashes of what looked like gold recalled the Otago gold rushes, the cost in terms of lives and land in the search for precious materials in hopes for a better life.

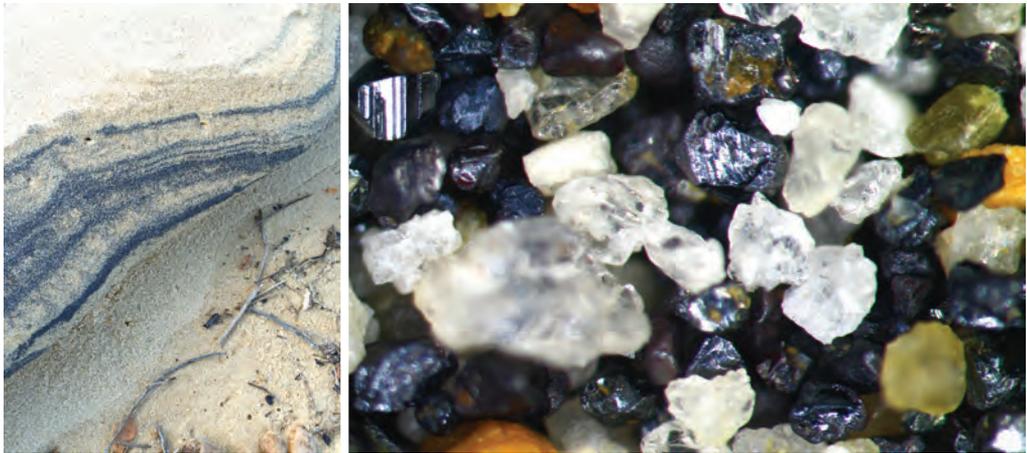


Figure 10. Tasman bay.

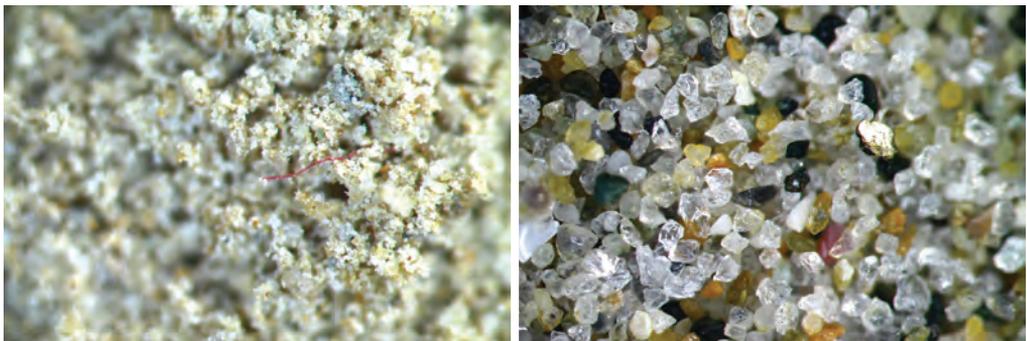


Figure 11. Glentui clay, Moeraki sand.

## AOTEAROA, LAND OF THE LONG WHITE CLOUD

I am very grateful for the time I spent in Aotearoa, for the astonishing landscapes and the connections I made with wonderful people, family who settled here 15 years ago and new precious friends, including those I met in Ōtepoti Dunedin during my first residency abroad. My most memorable experience was the hands-on research involved in sourcing my own clay bodies and preparing my own glazes, as Palissy had done before me.

While collecting and preparing uku and sands is a long process, one that requires patience, dedication and respect for the whenua, it is very rewarding insofar as it creates a sense of personal connection with and understanding of each unique characteristic of the land. With your hands in the soil and your feet on the ground, you build a sense of connection with nature and its inhabitants, the people and the 'nature' within, intertwined. I also valued the connections made across time and space – from a French ceramist of the Renaissance digging up his own materials to create ceramics and glazes, to the growing movement for collecting uku and earth materials in Aotearoa, always with an awareness of mana whenua.

I am grateful for the opportunity to connect with some amazing people. I was also lucky to meet Cora-Allan, at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, for a whenua painting workshop where she shared her knowledge and whakapapa about how to respect and prepare whenua pigments as paints, using shells as natural palettes. I later had the chance to meet a tuatara for the first time at Orokonui Ecosanctuary and draw it with the kōkōwai paint kept in shells from Cora-Allan's workshop.

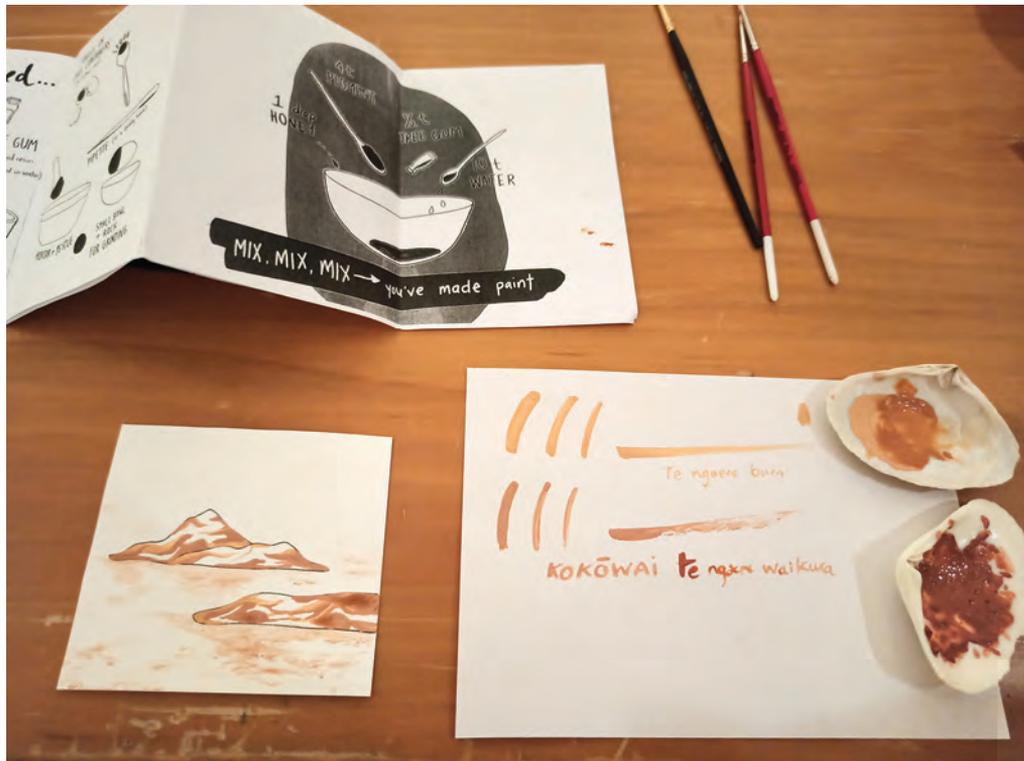


Figure 12. Using natural pigments workshop.

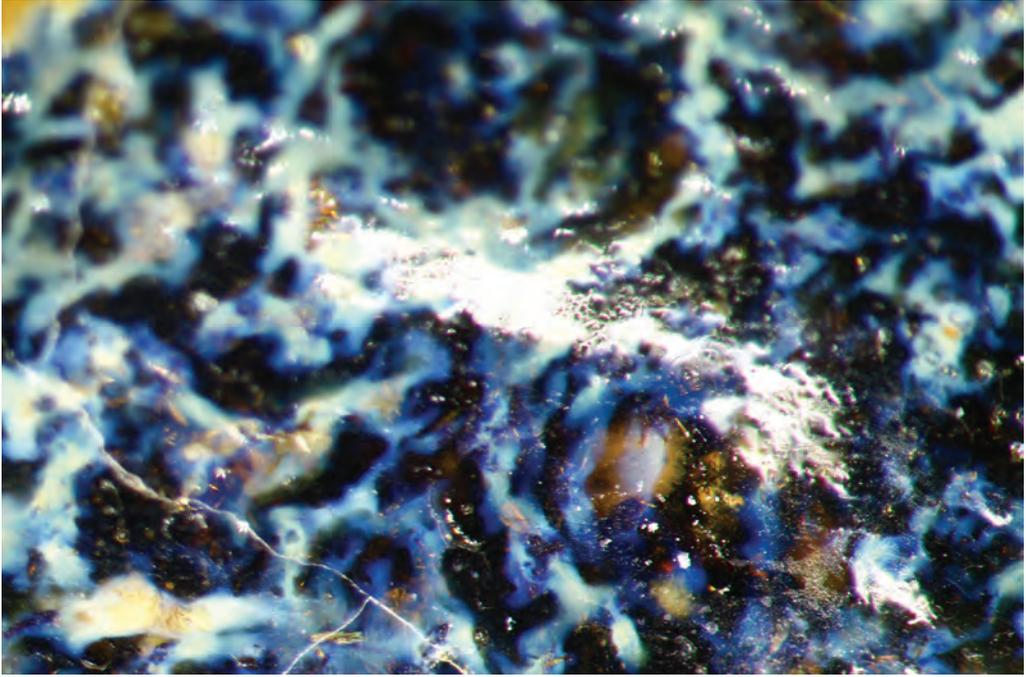


Figure 13. Aotearoa the long white cloud - glaze.

After my residency, I left my research, results and collections to the Ceramics Department of the Art School. In collaboration with student Jess Nicholson (Kāi Tahu, Ngāi Tūāhuriri, Kāti Mamoe) with materials sourced from Kauae Raro Research Collective, they will be used to educate students on how to gather and process local materials in a way that is respectful to mana whenua. Most of the marbled shells were distributed as koha and in memory of this residency.

Collecting shells in Aotearoa enabled me to connect to my birthplace, a beach in Normandy. Now when I see similar shells in France, I reconnect to this experience across the globe. It reminds me that we are all part of the same Earth and Mother Earth. During my journey, I mostly explored the South Island Te Waipounamu, but there is so much to see and experience in the North Island Te Ika-a-Māui as well. This will have to wait for another trip!

How rare and precious those encounters are in life for both mind and heart, which is what this residency was about for me.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In addition to those named above, thanks also go to Ed Hanfling. With postgraduate students, we visited the Hocken Library Collections where I was lucky to see Bridget Reweti's work using natural pigments overlaid on a gelatin silver photograph taken by the Burton Brothers for her exhibition 'Pōkai Whenua, Pōkai Moana.'<sup>4</sup> I was grateful to also find Len Castle's book *Making The Molecules Dance: Ceramics, 1948-2008* in the Hocken Library. Seeing this book aided my understanding, seeking and explorations over time and distance.

Toward the end of the residency, I learnt more about protocols for collecting local materials with respect to local mana whenua. Mana whenua are the local Māori tribes or iwi who have guardianship over their ancestral lands. If I could start over, I would make sure to reach out to local hapū Kāti Huirapa Ki Puketeraki and Ōtakou Rūnaka before embarking on any research that required gathering materials from their whenua.

It is with great respect and gratitude that I thank all the people who have helped me during my time in Aotearoa. Ngā mihi nui!

**Jeanne Dubois** is a French artist who finds inspiration in mineralogy, geology and chemistry. She has collaborated with scientists from the Louvre Research Department and the National Museum of Natural History of Paris. Her thesis "Adventure in Art Chemistry" and her art practice relate to her own explorations of art and science, with a desire to revive wonder, playfulness and the insatiable curiosity of childhood.

- 1 Len Castle, *Making the Molecules Dance: A Retrospective Exhibition of Ceramics, 1947-1994* (Lower Hutt: Dowse Art Museum, 1994). See also <https://teara.govt.nz/mi/rock-limestone-and-clay/page-7>
- 2 Mount Somers geology, NZ Insulators Archives.
- 3 "Tatyanna Meharry: Materials: Samples," 2023, <https://necessarytraditions.co.nz/necessary-traditions-the-main-event/>.
- 4 Bridget Reweti, 'Pōkai Whenua, Pōkai Moana,' Hocken Library, Dunedin. Reweti was Otago University's Frances Hodgkins Fellow, 2020–21.

## FELLOW TRAVELLERS

Joe Batt

### SKETCHING BEARS

Until a couple years ago I had almost no experience with bears in the wild...and then I suddenly saw them on several occasions. Once while biking on the Chehalis Western trail near my home in Olympia, Washington, and several times while hiking in nearby Olympic National Park. These experiences left me with a mixture of sensations; fear for my safety, gratitude for the opportunity, and profound worry for the well-being of these mysterious wild animals. Recently I spotted a small black bear on the beach of the Pacific Ocean, on the North Coast of Washington State. This bear was contentedly digging through kelp, looking for food about two hundred metres down the beach, when I heard a family of hikers approaching. They excitedly ran toward the bear with their cell phones, trying to get closer for a good picture. Not surprisingly, they startled the bear, and it ran into the woods.

I was thinking about bears when I arrived at the Dunedin School of Art for an artist's residency, in August of 2023. I was excited to start sketching them. I had only sculpted a bear once before, very recently in fact, and it was clunky, awkward and cartoony. While I had familiarity with other forms, such as humans and hares, the bear was still a mystery to me.

My sketches were a little rough and I wasn't sure I could get something completed in the short time I had in Dunedin. But I did a few gestural renderings of ideas on paper and in clay. The bear's form is challenging to capture. The structure is similar to other mammals, but also uniquely different, proportionally. The bear's head is similar to a dog or wolf, but squarer, with eyes straight ahead, and a distinct forehead.

I thought more about style and form. My recent works are mostly naturalistic, but a little fantastical and stylised. I considered clay artists who work in different styles such as Americans; Beth Cavener Stichter; Aurther Gonzlez, Jack Earl, Edith Garcia and Lisa Reinertson. I loved seeing Jim Cooper's colourful and gestural clay animals at Tūhura Otago Museum. I found inspiration in their approaches which helped guide me in my stylistic, technical and thematic decisions.

Once I had a sense of the general design, I needed to work out how the piece would stand on its own. A bear's form can have a lot of bulk, which would be difficult to support on four legs with clay. I decided to work from a solid mass and carve out the contours and spaces between the legs gradually, until the form was strong enough to support itself.



Figure 1. Bear in progress.

I used temporary armatures where needed, but the design ultimately needed to accommodate the limitations of the clay. So, while the bear's head and paws would be realistic in style, proportions would be stylised, to make the clay structure more stable. Based on my general experience, I felt that this compromise would work well.

As I worked, I enjoyed interactions with the delightful ceramics certificate and degree students in the ceramics facility. This was an exciting time of year when certificate students are visiting for a week of seminars and onsite learning with Senior Ceramics Lecturer, Rob Cloughley.

I knew I would add a child to this piece once the bear's form was rendered. After some experimentation I realised that a child in a hooded onesie looked good. The onesie looks comfortable and is suggestive of pyjamas and dreams. I've used it before and it is relatable and fun. A hare was added as a third character. A backpack was added to the child to emphasise his journey through the natural world. I liked the dynamic of a large predator, human child and hare travelling peacefully together. A lot of my work is narratively depicted from a child's perspective. At a young age, we often have a more profound connection with nature, which dissipates quickly as we grow and are integrated into society. I wonder, where does this journey lead as the child grows and becomes part of the global economy, to partake as a predatory force which relentlessly stresses the natural world. Many artists such as painter Josh Keyes, are wrestling with these kinds of issues also. This is my small way of touching on the delicate balance between humans and the rest of nature. It is a dream, but not entirely.

All parts of the piece needed to be hollowed out before firing. The small figures were removed to be worked on separately, and the bear was cut into sections, hollowed, and reattached. Once dry, the piece was fired at a low temperature to fuse the clay. Rather than doing a second firing with glazes, I was certain I wanted to do an atmospheric smoke firing. Rob had been doing some raku firing with the students, and I was given the go-ahead to use the raku reduction container to smoke fire this piece. This is a simple and quick process by which the sculpture is placed in a bin with burning combustibles, and the clay gets reduced by the burning process. The reduced oxygen and dense smoke flash the clay with dark painterly marks which are deeply embedded in the clay, adding depth to the surface.

The remaining days in Dunedin were a joy. The last stage of finishing, which I did with coloured pencils, took the longest. As the Polytechnic switched over to spring term, I was able to visit with many students, staff, and faculty, as they came by to see this slow process unfold. I found some good pencils at Art Zone art supplies store and began layering the marks, enhancing the forms, and adding some expressive colour to the piece. Thankfully the earthenware clay, I acquired from the ceramics department, fired a rich and beautiful deep red orange, and it looked great when smoke fired. The challenge of finishing with colour on clay is how to get the rich colours and expression I crave without diminishing the vitality of the fired clay forms. The coloured pencils offered visual intensity in a very thin layer which didn't cover the clay underneath with a thick material, in the way that slips and glazes often do.

## CONCLUSION

*Fellow Travellers* is part of an ongoing exploration of innocence, endurance, and our relationship with the natural world. The three characters in this dream-like scene occupy different places on the food chain but are moving as one unified group in the moment, in balance and in sync. This ceramic piece was hand built with stoneware clay, oxidation fired, and then smoke fired. Coloured pencils were added at the end.

During the last stage of the process, I had the opportunity to visit Harington Point by boat with my wife Rae. The water, wildlife, and land of this region are stunning and I wondered if it seemed odd to anyone besides myself that I would depict North American animals during my visit. The blue penguins, black swans, and albatross would make great subjects someday if we get to know each other better.

For now it's back to Washington State, and the bears.



Figure 2. Completed clay rendering.



Figure 3. Final stage of hollowing the bear.



Figure 4. Smoke firing in progress.



Figure 5. Smoke fired piece.

Joe Batt was the 2023 Artist in Residence at the Dunedin School of Art.



Figure 6. Joe Batt, *Fellow Travellers*, 2023, smoke fired stoneware and coloured pencils, 140x250x380mm. Permanent collection, Dunedin School of Art.



## ANIMATING THE INERT

Nathan McKay

Throughout my artistic practice, my work has been imbued with religious themes, where I have strived to capture sacred imagery through my sculptures. As I delve deeper into this exploration of religious symbolism, I have begun to contemplate the qualities and spiritual energy of the materials themselves. This has led me to consider the history of these materials and the significance of reusing discarded items. This approach has its origins in using found materials from my own childhood, as they hold a special importance and emotional resonance for me. Growing up in a family of hoarders, I have inherited a trove of materials that have been stashed away and forgotten. By incorporating these materials into my work, I am able to breathe new life into them and share their stories with others, something which brings me immense joy.

Reflecting on the evolution of my project, I initially experimented with materials like plates and phones, being conscious of religious themes centred on the melding of the sacred and profane. This led me to Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*,<sup>1</sup> with its amalgamation of divinity and original sin. I also found Steve Baker's essay "Botched Taxidermy,"<sup>2</sup> with its discussion of anthropomorphism similar to the symbolic imagery in Bosch's painting, with its strange creatures and hybrid beings. With these ideas in mind, it felt natural to pursue research on comedic horror and phenomenology, with French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*<sup>3</sup> as a guide to my work. This approach also directed my attention to holy objects that transcend materiality.



Figure 1. Nathan McKay, *Two Legged Four Legged*, 2023.

In my 2023 project, *Animating the Inert*, I sought to transform found materials into visually captivating pieces that would engage viewers on a personal level. One of my artworks, *Two Legged Four Legged*, was created using a variety of found objects. These lifeless objects were imbued with lifelike qualities and placed in carefully crafted environments using found materials like acorns, rocks, sand, bark and pinecones to create a semiotic artwork. This approach aligns with the semiotic theories of Roland Barthes, where the meaning of symbols is not fixed, but is constantly interpreted and reinterpreted by different cultural contexts.<sup>4</sup> Using his ideas of semiotics, the images become a prompt and the word or feeling associated with the image accompanies it. By repurposing found materials, I breathed new life and meaning into them, crafting immersive experiences where these objects appeared to possess human-like traits and cultural significance. This approach encouraged viewers to engage deeply and reflect on their own roles and relationships with the artworks.

To enhance the immersive experience, I created a soundtrack that used directional sound to fully occupy the viewer's senses when inside the exhibition space. The environment featured black walls, dark carpeting and boxes with black legs and exteriors, while lights inside the boxes glowed in the darkness, illuminating the artwork within and drawing viewers in like moths. Once inside, viewers became part of the creation themselves.

I used anthropomorphism to give objects human-like traits and forms, exploring the 'uncanny valley'<sup>5</sup> I had created to establish a connection between the object and humanoid likenesses. These objects were given expressive features, intensifying the subjective human connection. Inspired by automata, the objects not only observed the viewer, but also engaged with their surroundings. This approach aimed to connect the inanimate and the living, creating an immersive experience where the audience becomes an integral part of the art.

The commodification of objects as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution has changed how we observe and interact with them, raising critical questions about their intrinsic value and the role of art. Is the significance of objects limited to their marketability, or can they transcend human consumption to have a more meaningful existence? This transformation of objects into commodities not only severs emotional bonds, but also diminishes our sense of personal responsibility towards them, reflecting the broader impacts of a post-industrial society.

In a world where mass production has become the norm, the unique qualities of handmade objects are often overshadowed by the ubiquity and uniformity of factory-produced items. This mass production leads to a proliferation of kitsch – objects that are gaudy or overly sentimental, lacking genuine artistic value.<sup>6</sup> My work aims to challenge this norm by reinventing the handmade, breathing new life into materials that are typically dismissed as kitsch or purely functional.

By repurposing and transforming found materials, I strive to restore the emotional and aesthetic connections that have been lost in the age of commodification. This process not only emphasises the value of craftsmanship, but also reintroduces a sense of individuality and significance to each piece. Through my art, I seek to demonstrate that objects can possess a meaning beyond their market value, creating a deeper appreciation for the handmade and the personal narratives that these objects can convey.

The artists I studied for this project, Edward and Nancy Kienholz, use discarded materials to emphasise the semiotic potential within the objects (such as Edward Kienholz, *The Beanery*, 1965, assemblage, 253 × 670 × 190cm). Their works align with my own artistic style, as I draw inspiration from their distinctive approach. Notably, their use of discarded materials from junkyards has influenced my own artistic practice, facilitating the embodiment of semiotic significance within my creations. For instance, the Kienholz's installation *The Beanery* uses a variety of found objects to recreate a bar scene, imbuing the mundane setting with layers of social commentary and human emotion.

By repurposing discarded objects and integrating them into their artworks, they imbue these materials with a renewed sense of purpose and semiotic depth. This act challenges traditional ideas of artistic creation and elevates the status of the insignificant and forgotten materials of our world.



Figure 2. Nathan McKay, *Hoarding Rodent*, 2023, assemblage.

Similarly, I have incorporated the practice of using found materials in my own artistic process, drawn by the semiotic elements that are in the discarded objects. The Kienholz's approach to using materials from junkyards aligns closely with my own method of incorporating found objects into my works, such as *Hoarding Rodent*, which was created from various found materials like pinecones, shoe leather; doll hair and jewellery. My process of making involves grabbing whatever materials I have in front of me and piecing them together randomly, experimenting with the materials and seeing what works until I create something visually striking. As with the Kienholz duo, these materials are transformed from their original, often mundane contexts into components of impactful artworks. By repurposing and recontextualising these materials, I grant the objects a sense of life, allowing them to transcend their original purpose and assume a renewed significance within my art. This act of repurposing serves as a testament to the semiotic potential embedded within these materials as they acquire new narratives and evoke a sense of vitality that resonates with the viewer. The concept of semiotics in art extends beyond the selection of materials; it encompasses the broader notion of empowering the artwork itself to communicate and engage with its audience on a deeper, more meaningful level.

In addition to the Kienholz's, the Chapman Brothers (Jake and Dinos Chapman) have significantly influenced my artistic practice. Their exploration of consumerism using religious iconography has deepened my understanding of religious psychology and its role in consumer culture. The Chapman Brothers' *Insult to Injury* series, which repurposes Goya's prints from his *Disasters of War* series with their grotesque and satirical elements, resonates with my own practice of using found materials to create new narratives. The *Insult to Injury* series critiques the commodification of violence and suffering, mirroring my interest in how consumer goods and capitalism dominate human experience and nature. The concept of deodand—objects that cause harm being forfeit to the Crown or state—also informs my work.<sup>7</sup> By repurposing found materials, I draw a parallel to this idea, imbuing discarded objects with a renewed significance and semiotic potential. This transformation challenges viewers to reconsider the value of these objects, much like the Chapman Brothers' process of defamiliarising Goya's prints.

*Angel Baby* relates closely to the Chapman Brothers' art, particularly their *Insult to Injury* series, through its critical examination of consumerism, commodification and the grotesque by repurposing existing materials. Like the Chapman Brothers, who transform familiar objects to create new meanings, *Angel Baby* reconfigures a baby doll's head and multiple limbs from other Victorian dolls to resemble a biblically accurate angel. This use of found materials critiques consumer culture by reclaiming and transforming mass-produced items. The grotesque nature of *Angel Baby* mirrors the unsettling and provocative imagery in the Chapmans' work, challenging traditional aesthetic norms and evoking the uncanny. By employing religious iconography, *Angel Baby* satirises the commercialisation of religious symbols. The semiotic transformation of doll parts into a multi-limbed angel relates to the Chapmans Brothers' method of reinterpreting elements to generate new narratives. Additionally, the concept of deodand, where objects are given new significance, is reflected in the way *Angel Baby* utilises discarded materials, granting them new life and purpose. Through these shared techniques and themes, *Angel Baby* aligns with the Chapman Brothers' distinctive approach, contributing to the broader dialogue on consumerism, commodification and the deeper meanings embedded in everyday objects.

Another relevant artist for my work is Joseph Cornell, whose 'cabinets of curiosities' have greatly influenced my practice. Cornell's work involved creating intricate assemblages within handmade wooden boxes, a process that was both meticulous and imaginative, such as in Joseph Cornell, *Untitled (Palais de Cristal)*, ca. 1953. He would collect a wide variety of found objects – everything from photographs and prints to trinkets and natural specimens – and carefully arrange them within these boxes to create evocative, dreamlike tableaux. His process was akin to that of a collector or archivist, meticulously selecting and organising items to build new narratives and meanings. Cornell's 'cabinets of curiosities' draw on the historical concept of *Wunderkammern*, or 'wonder cabinets,' which were early forms of museums that displayed a wide range of objects intended to inspire awe and curiosity. By placing his assemblages in these confined spaces, Cornell was able to frame each object in a context that enhanced its significance and prompted viewers to explore the connections between the items. The effect was both intimate and immersive, encouraging a sense of discovery and personal engagement with the art.

Inspired by Cornell's method, I have integrated my own work into found wooden boxes. I built my own display boxes using wood donated to me, as well as painting the exterior black and having the interior walls painted in a patchy manner using different contrasting colours. This technique allows me to create contained, focused environments where the repurposed objects within can be appreciated in a curated, almost reverential manner. The handmade boxes not only provide a physical frame, but also contribute to the narrative



Figure 3. Nathan McKay, *Angel Baby*, 2023.



Figure 4. Nathan McKay, *Praise the Sun*, 2023, assemblage.

and emotional impact of the artworks. By housing my assemblages in these boxes, I aim to evoke a sense of wonder and contemplation, much like Cornell's creations, inviting viewers to delve deeper into the stories and meanings embedded in these ordinary and discarded objects.

Cornell's influence on my work is evident in the way these boxes transform the presentation of my assemblages. The enclosed spaces serve to elevate the found objects, encouraging a more profound engagement with their semiotic potential. This approach aligns with my goal of challenging traditional notions of value and significance in art, highlighting the beauty and complexity of materials that might otherwise be overlooked. Through this method, my work continues the legacy of Cornell's 'cabinets of curiosities,' offering viewers a curated experience that invites exploration and reflection on the interconnectedness of art, history and everyday life.

**Nathan McKay** is a Dunedin-based artist specialising in contemporary sculpture, known for his use of found materials. His work often explores themes of disregarded material and semiotics. Growing up in a family of hoarders, Nathan has always been fascinated by the stories objects can tell. By incorporating items from his childhood, he seeks to create pieces that resonate with viewers on a personal and emotional level. Through his work, Nathan aims to highlight the significance of the overlooked and forgotten.

- 1 Michael Meinhard, *Hieronymus Bosch's The Garden of Earthly Delights: The Senses and the Soul* (PubliQation, 2018).
- 2 Steve Baker, "Botched Taxidermy," *Antennae*, 7 (2008).
- 3 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1945).
- 4 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1973).
- 5 Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).
- 6 Winfried Menninghaus, "On the Vital Significance of 'Kitsch': Walter Benjamin's Politics of 'Bad Taste,'" in *Walter Benjamin and the Architecture of Modernity*, eds Andrew Benjamin and Charles Rice (Melbourne: re.press, 2009), 39–58.
- 7 Susan Ballard, *The Chair Did it: The Agency of Nonhuman Objects* (2012); Anna Pervukhin, "Deodands: A Study in the Creation of Common Law Rules," *The American Journal of Legal History*, 47:3 (2005), 237–56.

## EXPLAINING THE JOKES

Zac Whiteside

*Comedy is surprises, so if you're intending to make somebody laugh and they don't laugh, that's funny.*

Norm MacDonald

For me at least, when it comes to approaching Art, I believe if I want people to take the time to engage with my artwork, then I ought give them something to work with. I don't intend to give them all the answers immediately, but I feel that the first glance should act in some way as a teaser to the full movie which would encourage them to sit with the artwork for an extended second glance.

That 'something' is the bait, and in the case of my work it often comes in the form of humour achieved through visual wordplay. Using humour as my bait, I try to disarm the audience, transforming discussions that might otherwise feel uninteresting, unimportant or uncomfortable into conversations that are easier to engage with.

What follows is a brief unpacking of some of the research and thought that has gone into my work over the last two years.

### MOBILE MOBILE ('SITE 2022')

The genesis of my three-dimensional word play really kicks off with the work *Mobile Mobile*, the centrepiece of my work *A Bugs Life* for 'SITE 2022'. This satirical work is a twisted reimagining of a crib mobile, replacing the traditional celestial objects with glowing mobile phones. This choice underscored the parallel between the soothing distraction a crib mobile provides to an infant and the captivating hold smartphones have over our lives.

With its legs shuffling slightly across the floor as if tiptoeing, alongside the fuzzy, peach-textured phones, eerily resembling 'forbidden fruit' that hang from the branches of the mobile, the cot possesses a spirit of its own.

It has become a representation of the living force of technology, a blending of the 'cradle' with the 'treetop.' Humanity, infantilised, resides inside this cot of comfort ... that is, until the 'bough' breaks.

This work is the first notable instance where I started with using the literal as an entry point for the audience. Taking the homophone 'mobile' and making it into a very literal object, I created my first 3D play-on-words.



Figure 1. Detail of crib.



Figure 2. *Mobile Mobile* installation.

## THE GRASS IS GREENER ('SITE 2022')

At the heart of all my work is play. I think the resounding message, thought or intention underlying my work comes from the sentiment of "not taking life too seriously." I guess my intentions with my artworks are not to create super-serious pieces, but to create sincere pieces that can offer something to a wide range of people.

This message of 'non-seriousness' was probably best expressed through my work *The Grass is Greener* (next door to *A Bugs Life*), which led viewers down an artificial hallway of suburbia lined with a polystyrene picket fence, artificial grass, rows of fake roses, then up a ladder they could climb to look over the hedge. What was over on the other side? Well, that would not matter, as no matter what was over the hedge, the viewer would always be disappointed with what they found.

The point of the artwork was to have viewers experience feeling cheated after their expectations were subverted in a "what was the point of that?" kind of reaction. It did not actually matter what they expected, or what I put before them, it would never be exactly what they pictured.

Inspired by films like David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*<sup>1</sup> and Alejandro Jodorowsky's *The Holy Mountain*,<sup>2</sup> this work aimed to mirror the idealised reality of the Suburban Dream and modern society's subscription to 'tick-box lifestyles' that once completed, promise that we will arrive at happiness. This ideology has us chasing the next 'thing' on our list in pursuit of what Lacan calls "the big Other,"<sup>3</sup> that is an illusionary perspective of reality. "I've got to get a degree, get a job, get a house, get a partner, have kids, save for retirement." Once we have checked off our list, we have finished climbing the ladder and have finally arrived – but at what? What was it all for? Once we look over the hedge, the finished the illusion is broken and we feel cheated, because we feel the same as we always felt.

It's not that getting a car, or a house, or having goals is 'bad' in itself – it is having your mindset stuck in the future.



Figure 3. *The Grass is Greener.*

For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side-effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself. Happiness must happen, and the same holds for success; you have to let it happen by not caring about it.<sup>4</sup>

Viktor Frankl

In contrast to works such as *Mobile Mobile*, where it was my hope people would connect and actually like the work, with *The Grass is Greener* I was after that kind of reaction people give when you tell them, "Hey, it says Gullible on the ceiling." I got an overwhelmingly positive response of "Well, that was stupid" – which was exactly the kind of reaction for which I was hoping.

### BEHOLD OZ ('THE FOUR PLINTHS PROJECT 2023')

Starting off the new year of twenty-three, I set out on an expedition to complete the 'Four Plinths Project' commissioned by Otago Polytechnic. Taking on this project, I decided to venture out in a new direction from my previous years' work and do something completely different. Alongside me I had my trusty navigator Isabella Lepoamo and assistant Tristan McGregor.

*Behold OZ* explores the modern era's information landscape. These fragmented concrete sculptures, displayed outside the Polytech Hub as the archaeological remains of 'The Great Colossus of Ozymandias', require the audience to follow clues and 'dig up' the punchline for themselves. Upon excavation, the joke is revealed, and the audience discovers that these are in fact artworks and not archaeological discoveries.



Figure 4. *Behold Oz*.

Placed in public, the work comments on the prevalence of misinformation that we often 'walk past,' acting as a litmus test for the public's trust in institutions of influence like Otago Polytechnic. In today's media landscape, where sensationalism often trumps accuracy and clickbait titles distort reality for the sake of monetisation through clicks, it is easy to fall prey to misinformation. Platforms like TikTok and other social media bombard us with other people's opinions that are not necessarily true. It is imperative that we step back and examine both sides of the story rather than simply agreeing with those we like or disagreeing with those we don't.

The placement of *Behold OZ* outside the Otago Polytechnic Hub further emphasises the message, as it challenges the audience to confront these issues in their everyday environment. The work is a commentary on the trust we place in institutions and the importance of questioning authority and information sources, even in the familiar surroundings of our educational institutions.



Figures 5, 6 and 7. *Behold OZ*, work in progress.



Undertaking the various works that made up *Behold OZ*, I first sculpted all the forms in clay. Contrary to the story that appeared in the *Otago Daily Times*,<sup>5</sup> the works took a total of three months to complete, with the head alone taking an entire month to sculpt out of clay. Following this, I worked to create giant plaster break-moulds so that I could finally cast the forms in concrete.

The idea of creating 'archaeological' artworks is not a new one. *Behold OZ* sits adjacent to the works of Joshua Goode, who also makes 'faux' archaeological finds as artworks. Whereas *Behold OZ* operates within the public sphere as a lie, claiming to be real finds, presented in an educational institution, Goode's work reads more as a critique of capitalism and commentary on pop culture. By taking icons like the Simpsons and turning them into mismatched artifacts, he isn't trying to deceive anyone that these are fake.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of *Behold OZ*, although presented as a 'genuine' discovery, there are several clues that reveal the truth. Firstly, none of the fragments of 'The Great OZ' are to the same scale – the thumb is technically the largest, then the elbow crease, then the head, with the two legs being the smallest to scale. Secondly the head is modelled after Nicholas Cage. If those are not clues enough, the plaque itself is full of nonsense.



Figures 8, 9, and 10. *Behold OZ*, installation process.

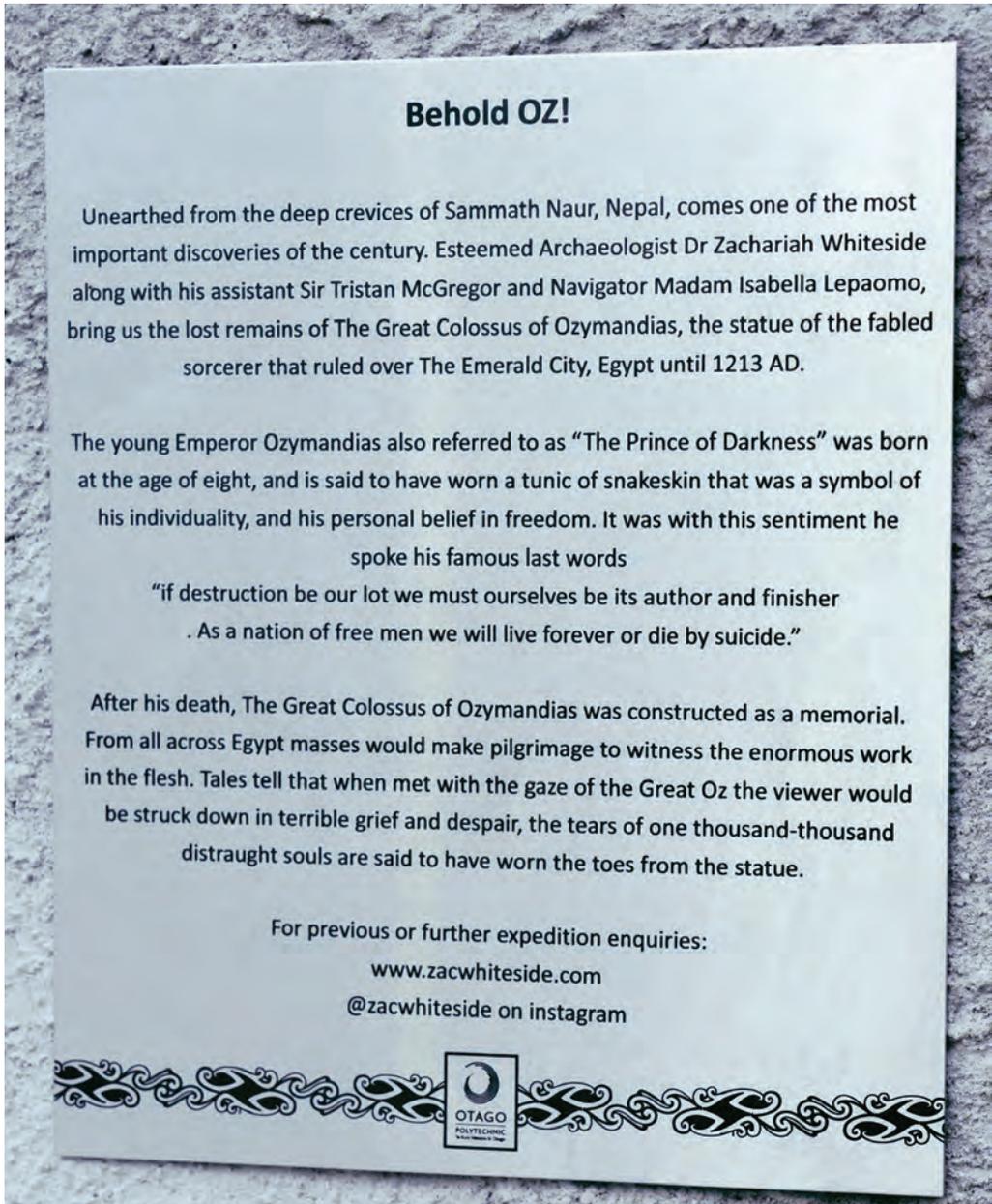


Figure 11. Behold Oz!.

With references to the film *The Wizard of Oz*,<sup>7</sup> the poem 'Ozymandias' by Percy Shelley,<sup>8</sup> Ozzy Osbourne and even a quote from Abraham Lincoln,<sup>9</sup> the work is a commentary on how easily information is misinterpreted. Furthermore, by displaying disparate elements together, the work prompts critical thinking about online reliability, while also reflecting on the potential confusion that future generations may face when interpreting our present in a tumultuous world.

## BEYOND OZ, BIT COINS AND BALLOT BOXES

After completing *Behold OZ*, I went back to an idea I had side-tabled for my honours, *The McBallot Box*, which would then become *PayWave*. Originally to be a McDonalds-themed ballot box with a *PayWave* station instead of a vote slot, this work evolved as I reflected upon my recently finished work.

While the idea behind *The McBallot Box* was to illustrate what it was to 'vote with your wallet,' the limitations of using the McDonalds iconography was the risk of the work only becoming about fast food. Wanting to go broader than this, I moved away from my initial idea and started developing designs for a Voting Monolith. Moving in this new direction, having just made a giant, one-tonne concrete head, my first inclination was to go bigger; creating a towering monolithic voting machine, akin to the monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. It would have a *payWave* system extruded out of the front and would be plastered with thousands of corporate logo stickers and poster advertisements.

However, after taking a step back, I felt that the form had leaped so far from the recognisable cardboard voting booths we all know, that the simple idea of juxtaposing the action of paying with the action of voting would be lost in this design. So, it was decided that I must keep it simple and create recognisable imitations of actual New Zealand voting booths.



Figure 12. "Chocolate" Bit Coins.

## BIT(TEN) COINS

*Bit Coins* was conceived as a play on words, *Bit Coins* borrowed its name from the renowned cryptocurrency<sup>10</sup> Bitcoin but took a different approach. Rather than minting a digital currency, I would create a series of bitten bronze coins – these teeth marks, my own, akin to the artist's signature, are an individualised touch that plays off the idea of seeing the artist's 'hand' in the work.

This idea developed after learning last year that it is against the law for cash to be refused as a means of payment, as it is legal tender.<sup>11</sup> This realisation prompted me to ponder the significance of cash, not only as embodying a right to privacy, but also the impact of its physicality on our psychology during transactions, compared to alternative payment methods like payWave, Eftpos, Afterpay and, of course, cryptocurrencies.

From having to count out coins to being able to tap a card or even your phone, in just the last century our modes of engaging in trade have changed enormously. Dropping like a bomb, in 1946 credit cards first appeared.<sup>12</sup> With Eftpos cards coming to New Zealand in 1985,<sup>13</sup> it took till 2011 for the introduction of contactless payments. Moreover, countries like Sweden<sup>14</sup> are embracing entirely cash-free digital economies, a development which raises concerns about privacy and control over our financial transactions.

Originally intended to be a series of bronze-cast replica New Zealand coins with bite marks, the work evolved when I decided to make them into replica chocolate coins. Keeping them bronze, but adding a chocolatey patina<sup>15</sup> and displaying the coins with a series of gold-leafed foil wrappers, the joke deepened: these are now the inedible imitation of an edible imitation of an inedible object.



Figures 13 and 14. *Bit(ten) Coins*, work in progress in the Dunedin School of Art sculpture studio foundry.



Figures 15, 16 and 17. *Bit(ter) Coins*, work in progress in the Dunedin School of Art sculpture studio foundry. Photographs: Isabella Gillanders.

Chocolate coins hold a special place in Kiwiana<sup>16</sup> iconography, immediately recognisable and cherished by many. They serve as an entry point for children to begin understanding the concept of money. In a similar vein, my chocolate coins function as a gateway to a broader conversation about physical cash and the implications of the ongoing shift toward digital currencies like Bitcoin. These *Bit Coins*, larger than genuine New Zealand currency, carry significant weight in symbolising how we spend our money and the mediums we employ to do so, emphasising the seriousness of the issue if we lose cash entirely.

The bite marks aid in disguising the bronze as soft chocolate, tempting the viewer to bite them. However, biting these coins would be like biting a piece of display fruit. Just as in the sixteenth century, when counterfeit lead coins contaminated the economy – biting the soft lead coins revealed their fakeness – these coins, disguised as the chocolate imitations, also reveal their true nature when bitten: hard, cold bronze.

By trading my *Bit Coins* in art trades with fellow artists after 'SITE 23', they once again blurred the lines between what may be considered valuable in the artworld. How many 'bit coins' is one work worth compared to another? Can I debase the value of my coins? Or can I inflate their value? Well, since 'SITE 23', they have found themselves in Dunedin's Gallery De Novo<sup>17</sup> listed at a higher price, and so they have already inflated in value.

What happens down the line when I begin to price my artwork using my own coins? "This painting can be purchased using 10-bit coins." What happens when I stop producing them? These are questions I plan to explore over the next few years as I continue to build my art practice.

## VOTING BOOTHS ('SITE 2023')

Expanding on the idea of 'voting with your wallet' introduced by *PayWave*, I sought to embody the overarching concept of 'Actions as Votes' in the two additional voting booth works, *Pay Attention* and *Pay It Forward*. While *PayWave* highlights the act of voting through financial support, where money represents the medium for our actions, this notion extends to all the actions we undertake. Every choice we make can be seen as a vote in the broader context of our interactions.

If the action of voting is understood as the expression of advocating for something, then it would follow that for any deliberate action we take, by doing that action, we have in fact advocated it.

Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative<sup>18</sup> is the deontological moral philosophy used to evaluate motives for action. Kant proposes that we should "act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."



Figure 18. Voting Booths.



Figure 19. PayWave.

Consciously or unconsciously, when we take an action, we are producing more of that action. If I steal, there is one more stolen thing in the world. Kant highlights the framework making up this fundamental logical reality and builds on it, proposing that we ought to act with this process in mind, prompting a more conscious way of navigating decision making.

Building on Kant's Categorical Imperative, I would propose that in this framework, every action the individual takes should be regarded by that person as a vote for that action. I call this framework 'Actions as Votes.'

Once our actions have become votes in our minds, we start to live more consciously regarding what we are advocating for and contributing to society. However, not all actions in our day-to-day lives are as simple as that, as we live in an abstracted world full of nuance where there are many circumstances in which an individual will be completely unaware of what they are voting for when they take an action.

In the 'Actions as Votes' framework presented by the voting booths, there is no prescribed morality shoved in the viewer's face except their own. The voting booths simply outline a fundamental reality – they do not instruct the viewer how or why to vote, only that they are voting.

As we explore this framework presented by the voting booths, they start to function as institutional critique.

### ***'Actions as Votes' in a world of nuance***

While *Behold OZ* operates directly as a source of misinformation, in the context of our political climate the voting booths also point to issues of 'fake news' – regarding what we buy in *PayWave*, what we watch in *Pay Attention* and what 'good' we think we are doing in *Pay It Forward*.

A good example of such an action is buying an electric car; a purchase that has been politicised as typically an act of 'good,' of altruism. However, after doing some research we soon discover the unethical way in which rechargeable battery technologies are produced, with some vehicle batteries using chemistry which requires cobalt, mined under slave-like conditions in Third World countries.<sup>19</sup>

This example emphasises the struggle of acting morally within an industrial capitalist society that is founded on the exploitation of other people. If we are to think of every possible outcome of anything and everything we do, before we did it, we would be stuck, frozen, unable to act.

In politics, no party nor candidate is going to represent our values perfectly, and neither do corporations and the products they produce. If we are to 'vote' only for products or candidates that fully represent us, then many of us would be stuck, unable to act, while we consider all the possible ramifications of our actions.

### ***Voting Autonomy in an Industrial Society***

Unfortunately, acting completely morally in modern society is incredibly difficult when we consider all the nuances. As I pointed out with *Behold OZ*, when it comes to misinformation, we must navigate a world of abstract truths, where it is a full-time job informing yourself about each side of every story.

Because we are heavily reliant on industrial society to meet our basic survival needs, our autonomy to act entirely in accordance with our individual moral ethos becomes harder to exercise when the individual lacks the ability to survive outside of it. Within each choice offered, each individual has the ability to exercise different freedoms based on their skills, knowledge and expendable income.

When I was thinking about *PayWave*, I realised immediately that if in this instance money is our vote, then some people have more votes than others, and so our economy cannot be truly democratic. Extending this thought, because there are disparities in wealth, we are all voting with different candidates available to each of us.

For instance, one individual might not be able to vote for organic food because they only have enough votes to afford the budget brands drenched in pesticides, meaning in turn that they have less autonomy over their health.

As Alexander Berkman eloquently states:

The freedom that is given you on paper, that is written down in law books and constitutions, does not do you a bit of good. Such freedom only means that you have the right to do a certain thing. But it doesn't mean that you can do it. To be able to do it, you must have the chance, the opportunity. You have a right to eat three fine meals a day, but if you haven't the means, the opportunity to get those meals, then what good is that right to you? <sup>20</sup>

Following the logic inherent in juxtaposing the action of monetary exchange with the action of voting, my work *PayWave* presents the beginnings of an institutional critique. With capitalism in an industrialised society, we cannot have a democratic economy as the autonomy to act on the 'freedoms' promised in this society differ from one individual to the next.

### ***The commodification of our attention in Pay Attention***

*Pay Attention* was inspired by a personal struggle that many of us have faced – our insatiable addiction to the digital realm. This idea was sparked when I found myself entrapped in the endless scroll of Instagram reels,<sup>21</sup> an irresistible allure that threatened to consume precious hours of my life. To combat this compulsion, I employed mindfulness.

I realised that my time spent in the labyrinth of social media was not without cost, although it might seem 'free' on the surface. In exchange for 'costless' access to these platforms, we unwittingly relinquish a piece of our privacy, casually signing it away in the dense legalese of terms and services.<sup>22</sup> Our personal data, the treasure trove of our online activities, becomes the currency we unconsciously barter. Every like, share or comment we make, every video we watch and every post we interact with generates income for the big social media platforms such as Instagram.<sup>23</sup>

This revenue model, reliant on various forms of advertising and the existence of 'monetised accounts',<sup>24</sup> hinges on the commodification of our attention. It is no longer merely the time we invest; it is the very essence of our focus, which is harvested, packaged and sold to the highest bidder. By reminding myself of this each time I click onto an application, I can consciously navigate my time spent on any one, only spending an amount of time with which I am comfortable.

With *Pay Attention*, the work is not only a commentary on our digital age; it is a reminder that the act of looking, scrolling and swiping has become a valuable commodity in a world driven by data. It beckons us to pause, to contemplate and to reclaim control over our most precious asset – our undivided attention. In so doing, we break free from the invisible chains that tether us to the digital world that often threatens to keep us perpetually distracted.

*Pay Attention* reframes the action of giving our attention as a vote, a conscious action that can create change.



Figure 20. *Pay Attention*.



Figures 21 and 22. *Pay it Forward*.

## PAY IT FORWARD

*Pay it Forward* presents us with a juxtaposition of choices: a bowl of native kowhai seeds and a pile of pine seeds. These options invite us to reflect on the nuances of doing good, highlighting the complexities that arise when navigating the path of altruism. The seeds nestled within this artwork are a metaphor, urging us to sow the seeds of change that will yield the fruit we may never taste.

The metaphor of “planting trees we won’t sit under the shade of” encapsulates the essence of this work, urging us to consider the long-term implications of our actions. While growing pine trees may seem like a step towards combating climate change, their invasive nature poses a threat to biodiversity. On the other hand, native kowhai trees not only contribute to biodiversity but also support our native wildlife.

In this way, *Pay it Forward* serves as a reminder of the importance of mindful decision-making. Each seed we choose to plant represents a commitment to fostering a more sustainable and compassionate world. Just as a tree grows to provide shade for future generations, our actions have the power to shape the environment in which those who come after us will live.

As these works stand within the context of a group exhibition, *PayWave*, *PayAttention* and *Pay it Forward* collaborate with the other artworks on show to provide a reframed perspective. Our actions within this gallery become expressions of support: buying student artworks becomes a vote for budding art careers; our attentive presence affirms the importance of arts in our society; and, in embracing these moments, we engage in a collective act of “paying it forward.”

## STEPS FORWARD

Looking at my work, I can see a pattern forming and feel new ideas brewing. I think back to when I did not have a distinctive style and was overthinking who I wanted to be and what I wanted to create. It was 2021, I was in second year, my first year at the art school; riddled with anxiety about the future, I had chewed my nails down to the bone.

My sculpture tutor Michele Beevors sat me down and asked me where I wanted to see myself in ten years. “Well, I want to make films,” I answered. “So, well, then start now,” she told me. She could see my ideas were too big for my belly. I was hesitating to create, because I wanted to execute my ideas true to my vision, which frankly I lacked the skill to do – but I had to make something, otherwise I would never learn the skills I needed to create these ‘amazing’ film ideas I had.

Michele really put things into perspective for me. She told me this story of some guy who was always talking about how he was going to write this amazing sci-fi novel. Every year he'd tell her about how he was going to do it, but 30 years on he still hadn't started, and so she warned me, "Don't be that guy." That day I decided I was going to become a filmmaker:

I told Michele my decision that I was going to make a film. She encouraged me to start small and just shoot one scene, or just make the trailer: I was only in my second year of art school and didn't need to rush into making an entire movie by myself. She kept saying something about not going bigger than *Ben Hur* ... Well, I didn't even know who this Ben fella was or why he was so big, so for the better half of second year I went on to attempt to create a full-length feature film.

Flip forward to now, and I am a sculptor:

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- 17 <https://www.gallerydenovo.co.nz/artists/zac-whiteside>.
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## TIAAT TAIWAN INTERNATIONAL AUSTRONESIAN ART TRIENNIAL 2023

Kim Lowe

As an artist of mixed Chinese–Pākeha heritage and a member of a whānau who whakapapa to Kāi Tahu, Kati Māmoe and Waitaha, I have always been drawn to the visual and cultural links between East Asia and the Pacific and have often wondered if investigating the Austronesian links to Aotearoa may lead to further understanding about my own Chinese ancestry. As a fourth-generation Chiwi, I am aware that much of our Chinese cultural understanding had been assimilated out of our knowledge; like the many migrants who embarked on new beginnings in colonial countries, our whānau was no different, resulting in generational loss of language. Artistic careers were discouraged because time was better spent in creating a new life in the jobs that were allowed to us – like running a fruit shop and restaurant, or studying for one of the three approved professions: doctor, lawyer or accountant.

Part of my long-term research has been to connect with Asian artists and find cultural links as a way to personally revive and relearn some of this forgotten cultural knowledge that was once held by our Chinese tūpuna through the establishment of artist-led networks. The Shared Lines Collaborative, an artists' network with a focus on resilience and connection across borders that was born out of the Christchurch and Tohoku (Japan) earthquakes and following tsunami of 2011; and the Aotearoa Chinese Artists (AChA), that morphed into Asian Aotearoa Artists Hui and culminated in the large-scale AAAHui 18, 23 and 24 (led by Associate Professor Kerry Ann Lee at Massey University) are two such initiatives.

Because of my limited language knowledge, I have had to learn about the culture of my ancestors through a Western lens – my interest in Mātauranga Māori and indigenous and traditional practices from throughout Asia Pacific is intended to counter this. Following fate, opportunity and/or intuition, and throwing the net wide to see what sticks, is my way of networking and fishing for interconnection. Thanks to a Te Pūkenga research grant and the connections suggested by Shared Lines trustee Ngaroma Riley (Te Rarawa, Te Aupōuri), my sister Lee-Ana, daughter Haani and I were able to travel to Taiwan to attend the inaugural TIAAT Taiwan International Austronesian Art Triennial 2023, where we were fully immersed in indigenous life for a few days.

Taiwan has an interesting colonial history. It was fiercely independent and guarded by its many indigenous tribes from both Chinese and Japanese influences up until European expansion into East Asia began during the silk, spice, and then the opium trade and related wars during the sixteenth century. From then on, Taiwan was fought over and ruled by successive nations including the Portuguese, Dutch, Spanish and of course China and Japan.<sup>1</sup> It was during the 40 years of occupation by the Dutch East India Company between 1624 and 1662 that the Chinese population in Taiwan increased from fewer than 5000 to nearly 50,000, as Chinese labourers were brought in to help with trade and agriculture.<sup>2</sup> During this time, the local indigenous tribes that had occupied the coastal areas for millennia and fought off all intruders were displaced; they were relocated further and further inland and driven into mountainous regions.

Austronesia spans about two thirds of the Earth's surface, from Madagascar right across to the Americas, and encompasses the great oceanic areas of Moana Nui-a-Kiwa, the Pacific Ocean, Micronesia, Melanesia and South East Asia. Genetically and culturally, Taiwan can be regarded as a stepping-off point for early explorers who then went

on to populate the far-flung island nations of Austronesia. In the television series *Origins*,<sup>3</sup> presenter Scotty Morrison describes Taiwan as an early Hawaiki, as oceangoing groups spread out, developed and populated the islands of the Pacific and lastly Aotearoa.

In his TIAAT exhibition essay, "Our Distance from the Sea," Dr Yuan-Chao Tung characterises the loss of knowledge among Taiwan's indigenous tribes about traditional maritime skills, travel and sustainable living as "contemporary blank spaces in memory."<sup>4</sup> The kaupapa of TIAAT was to strengthen the 'meshworks' of indigenous Austronesian artists and practitioners; and give indigenous knowledge-holders a place to share, exhibit and revive some of these practices in Taiwan, the Austronesian motherland. With the Ocean given priority over land, the event was intended to "present 'an oceanic perspective' of the Earth, emphasising the openness of the ocean to avoid the traps and barriers associated with nation states."<sup>5</sup> Island hopping, maritime culture and the watery highways are placed at the centre; the narrative is flipped and connection and commonality is prioritised over country, state and political differences, moving away from a continental mindset.<sup>6</sup>

The theme of the inaugural triennial, "RamiS: Tracing Origins," was especially significant; *ramis* means 'root' in proto-Austronesian, and the event focussed on connecting artists from the many tribal areas of Taiwan as a source of creative inspiration. The paper mulberry tree was also used as a symbol of RamiS and as a connector; it is a common plant in Taiwan, while also being culturally significant throughout the Pacific, where it is used to make *tapa* cloth, *siapo* or *hiapo*, and must have been transported on many of those early settlement voyages. It is intended that TIAAT will eventually connect with indigenous artists from across the wider Austronesian region but, being the inaugural event, most of the 25 artists and collectives attending were from local Taiwanese tribes. Only three of the participating artists were from other nations: Lisa Reihana (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Hine, Ngāi Tūteauru), with her 2019 video *Nomads of the Sea*; Balinese sculptor and Taiwanese resident, I Made Sukariawan, who showed his collection of intricately carved forms emerging from polished driftwood; and kinetic sculptor Chee Wai Loong from Malaysia.

The venue for the triennial, the Taiwan Indigenous Peoples Culture Park, is a government-funded heritage site situated in Pingtung County, in the interior of the southern mountain region. Covering an area of 83 hectares, the park weaves its way up the mountains; it can be accessed through Majia township, which forms a crossroads for at least three mountain tribes, the Sandimen, Majia and Wutai.<sup>7</sup> The first exhibition hall, located close to the entrance of the park, housed the sub-section "Becoming Spiritual." Curator Nakaw Putun (Pangcah) asked if returning to a state of spiritual animism could be the answer to our collective futures. Nakaw suggested that taking the time to appreciate all living things, give thanks, be mindful and call on the deities could be a way to slow consumption and fully appreciate the time and effort it takes to procure and source natural materials. Themes of identity and re-indigenising practices were prevalent amongst her choice of artists.

Aluaiy Kaumakan and members of her tribe created an installation, *Cevuji (Path of a Family)*, comprising stitched and rubbed banners. The installation weaves together rubbings made from the ruins, abandoned houses and rocks from the river where the displaced Paridrayan tribe once resided. After Typhoon Morakot (2009), the Paridrayan people were displaced and forced to relocate further down the mountains. Aluaiy Kaumakan gathers ash and pigments from ritual burning and traces tribal memories through frottage rubbings. "As I rub, tears flow. Perhaps it's because the original materials are mixed with tears, my rubbings are particularly grey."<sup>18</sup> For the artist, it is the work expended in bringing the community together to perform ritual and ceremony, the time taken to rub, stitch and sew while recounting family stories which are more meaningful than the finished product.



Figure 1. Tanivu Tapari (aka Wang Yu-Hsin), *Awakenings*, 2023, tafalong clay, rebar, terracotta fragments, cement and wood. Installation view, with the artist in front of the TIAAT banner.



Figure 2. Aluaiy Kaumakan, *Cevuji, Path of a Family*, 2023, fibres, mud-dye cloth, charcoal and ash. Installation view.

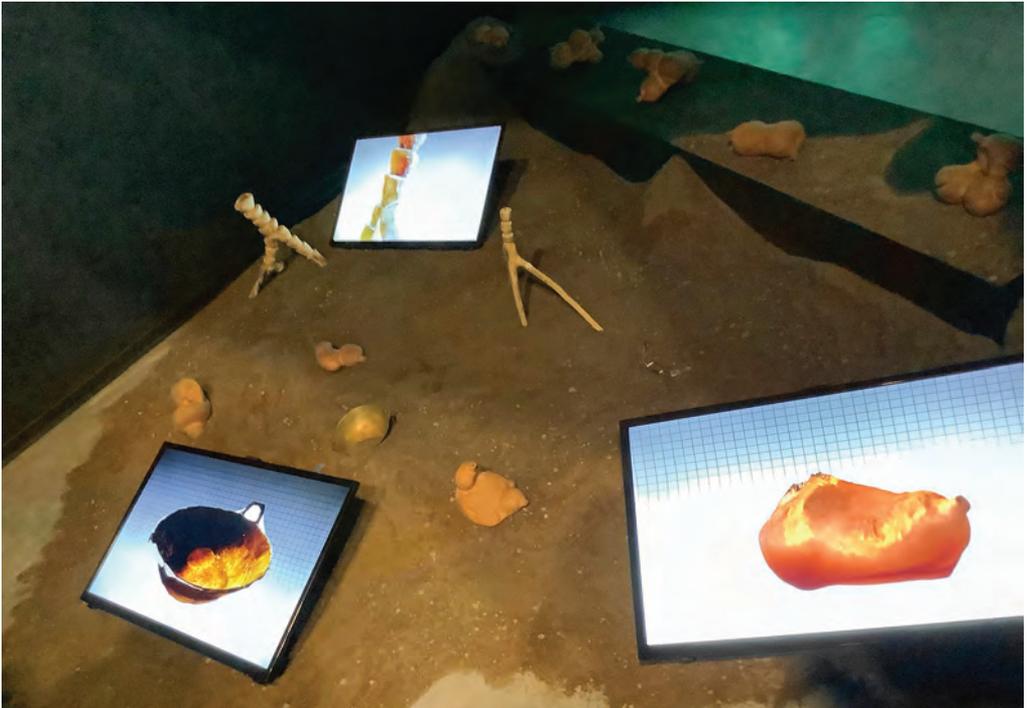


Figure 3. Ciwas Tahos (aka Anchi Lin), *Finding Pathways to Temahahoi – Artwork Series*, 2022–23, installation detail, with ceramic ocarina instruments, and single-channel HD video.

I had previously encountered the work of Ciwas Tahos (aka Anchi Lin) when she gave an artist talk at the Physics Room Ōtautahi earlier in 2023. This was presented alongside her exhibited double-channel video work, *Perhaps She Comes To/From Alang*. This iteration of *Finding Pathways to Temahahoi* was a more extensive realisation, achieved through her installation of objects (three-person musical instruments and divining rods); wall and window drawings with links to her animated virtual world; and haunting sound and performance videos, accompanied by enlarged details of her ceramic sound instruments (and brass pots representing colonial gifts to her people that had caused infertility). Exploring indigenous perceptions of gender, Ciwas created a world based on an ancient and mythical society of Temahahoi women who were able to self-fertilise and communicate with bees.

The pavilion curated by Etan Pavavalung was about a ten-minute bus ride uphill to the History Museum. Etan is originally from a Tavadrán village that was also destroyed during Typhoon Morakot; the tribe now lives in Rinari village at the base of the mountain. With the recent passing of his father and tribal leader Pairang Pavavalung earlier in 2023, he has become the leader of his tribe. Etan and his wife Grace also help to run a community arts centre equipped with carving studio and artist residency, and they were our generous hosts during our stay in Rinari. Etan's curatorial theme was "Why We Are Us," and by bringing together artists from indigenous tribes throughout Austronesia he was aiming to create a space to be strengthened, grow and learn from indigenous shared origins. He talked about *lima* (handicrafts) and how they are used to tell cultural narratives and tribal stories. Etan's focus is on making pathways to interconnect with each other as tribal people; with other Austronesian tribes; with the environment; and with the universe through space and time, sharing handicrafts, knowledge and ritual of the past for the benefit of future generations.<sup>9</sup> Many of the artists he gathered had created works using naturally found or grown organic materials, including paper mulberry, driftwood, rattan, natural pigments and dyes.

Even though the artforms exhibited were different, many of the themes felt familiar. Walking through I Made Sukariawan's entranceway through the mouth of the Barong Lion into the Indigenous Lifestyle Exhibition House was like walking into a wharenuī. His colourful jig-sawed cutouts and beautifully carved, polished half-animal forms reminded me of Cliff Whiting's mixed use of power tools and traditional carving methods. The carved boats of Sya Man Misrako reminded me of Simon Kaan's waka forms. Milay Mavaliv's crochet and woven hangings suspended from the ceiling were a softer version of Mataaho Collective's woven *Te Puni Aroaro* at Te Papa,<sup>10</sup> elevating domestic, repetitive work done by women in a monumental way. Our English-speaking Rinari contact Sutipau Tjaruzaljum, also known as Chen Liang, Angela or Angy (a name given to her by her Kiwi father), had collaborated with fellow Paiwan artist Ljaljeqelan Patadalj to create an installation made up of video and large-format photos of tribal elders that had been cut, stripped, then rewoven back together – perhaps representing the artists' tribal loss and reclamation efforts.

I would have liked to have spent more time with some of the artworks, especially the large, multi-coloured land-and island-form woodblock prints of Ali Istanda (aka Hu Chia-yu); or the contemporary avatar-like sculptures and assemblages of Anguc Makaunamum (aka Kao Min-Hsiu), whose sculptural work spoke of hybridity and navigating an urban and tribal identity. But because we were reliant on our translators, we only had a few minutes to view each of the works as we stuck to the planned itinerary.

Throughout our stay, communication with the artists and organisers was made through our Japanese translator and photographer Yasuhiro Iguchi – also known as Alan, a Paiwan name given to him on a previous residency – and his friend and business partner Yuta Iguchi. Language and translation was very fluid. While we mostly connected in English, because many older Taiwanese learned Japanese during the Second World War, Japanese is still commonly spoken, along with Mandarin Chinese, local Taiwanese dialects and English. However, like the political revitalisation of te reo Māori in Aotearoa, and because there is a move to revitalise the tribal indigenous languages, we tended to converse using our very limited knowledge of New Zealand Cantonese, Mandarin, te reo Māori and few words from tribal languages which we picked up. The language didn't matter – it was karaoke (thanks, Haani), food and drink, smiles, laughter, humility, generosity and a love of art that connected us all.

As Nakaw reminded us to connect with resources through spiritual animism, and Etan made space and time for reconnecting with tradition, the whakatauki “Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua comes to mind:” “I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on the past” – a reminder to keep traditions alive and continue reinventing them for future prosperity. Learning, sharing and reconnecting with practices that value natural resources and reworking these into our everyday practices as a way to support sustainability and meaning for future generations.

Perhaps in future triennials we will see more Māori and Pacific representation as the TIAAT grows in reach and branches out from its RamiS beginnings.

Sabau; mali mali; kia ora rā.



Figure 4. Reretan Pavavaljung. One of the 19 paintings in his *Innumerable Differences, One World* series, 2023, acrylic on canvas.



Figure 5. Anguk Makaunamun (aka Kao Min-Hsui), *Memory Tablet Series*, 2023, photographic paper and locally sourced natural materials, with the artist.

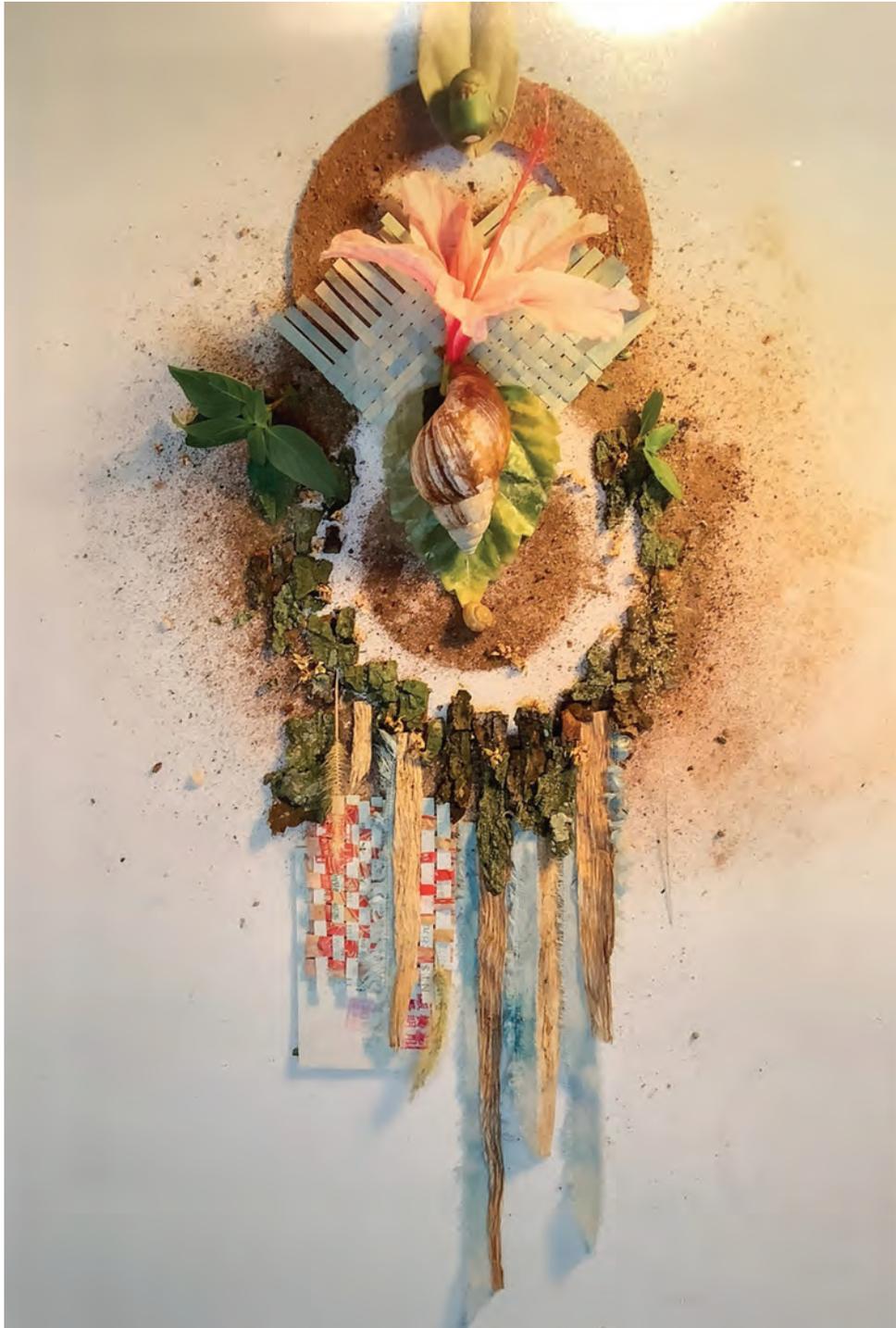




Figure 7. I Made Sukariawan, *Oh Water?*, 2021, wood, with the artist.

Figure 6. Anguk Makaunamun (aka Kao Min-Hsui), *Memory Tablet Series*, 2023, detail, photographic paper and locally sourced natural materials.



Figure 8. Ali Istanda (aka Hu Chia-yu), *After the Flood, There are Islands*, 2022, detail, 434x88cm, woodblock printing.

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## GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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

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Mātauranga Māori is a significant component of Aotearoa/New Zealand's heritage, and sharing mātauranga Māori facilitates inter-cultural dialogue and understanding that is in the national interest. However, we recognise that the originating Māori community and/or individual has the primary interest as kaitiaki over the mātauranga and we are therefore committed to ensuring that the sharing, promotion and innovation based on mātauranga Māori respects and enhances its cultural and spiritual integrity, as well as that of the originating community and/or individual.

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

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

Enquiries about future submissions can be directed to: scope.editorial@op.ac.nz.

