

## Residency Report

# YOU ARE NOT HERE: THE DARK LIGHT ART COLLECTIVE'S EXPERIENCE OF THE HONE TUWHARE WRITERS' RESIDENCY, JULY 2014

Rachel Hope Allan

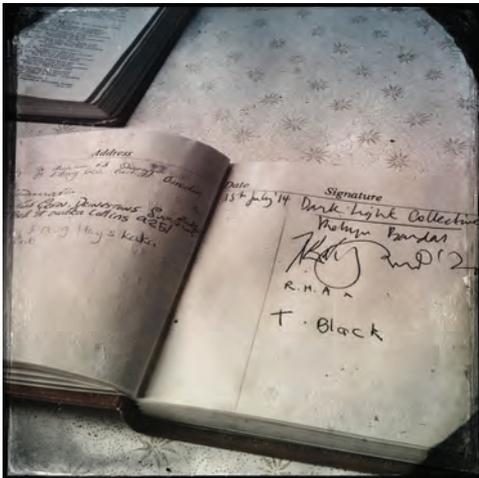


Figure 1.



Figure 2.

In 1992, Hone Tuwhare (1922-2008; Nga Puhi iwi; hapu Ngati Korokoro, Ngati Tautahi, Te Popoto and Te Uri-O-Hau), aka 'the travelling bard' and 'people's poet,' moved to the small South Otago seaside settlement of Kaka Point. There in a modest crib he lived out the remainder of his life, concentrating on his writing. He was a New Zealand poet laureate, held two honorary doctorates in literature and was widely acclaimed, nationally and internationally. The Hone Tuwhare Trust was established in 2010 "to inspire people through the preservation, promotion and celebration of Hone's legacy."<sup>1</sup>

Dark Light Art Collective's beginnings hark back to a lively discussion over a morning coffee in the beautiful but bleak Gibbston Valley in Central Otago. Four established artists, who all attended Dunedin School of Art for postgraduate studies and who choose to live in the South Island, set up this new collaborative enterprise to support and foster relationships built while studying at the DSA. The collective's art practices encompass – but are not limited – to electronic art, new media, the archive, sculptural forms, playwriting, photographic practices, painting and performance.



Figure 3.

DLAC sought to be the first recipients of the Hone Tuwhare writers' residency program and, if possible, the only visual artists. The collective proposed to "augment and reposition the space and sense of place by engaging with the original written works of Hone Tuwhare, the local environs and the community at large in a visual format." Once our proposal had been accepted by the trust (headed by Hone's son Rob), we thought it would be a good idea to experience the place without the burden of our gear in order to familiarise ourselves with the surroundings and make ourselves known to the locals.

Our reconnaissance visit to Kaka Point left me feeling numb. He wasn't there – any trace of the man that was had been removed. Except for a hand-knitted blanket, suspiciously placed in a chair by the wood-burning fire. There was nothing. I had gone with expectations of walls covered with newspaper clippings and photographs, but



Figure 4.



Figure 5.

that was all gone. Even the floor coverings had been lifted, leaving hints of the fibre at odd spots where the nails hadn't been retrieved. We ate a picnic pie at his table, sweeping rat poison and crumbs onto the floor; listening to the sea as the breeze nipped at our ankles. We were visual artists on a writers' residency, the first residency without a residence.

We sought refuge in a deconsecrated church a few doors down. As we stepped through the kicked-in door and turned our backs to the sea we revelled in the bleak abandoned pageantry that greeted us. Sitting in front of the red sanctuary curtains, upon a stage once graced by holy men and women, Kristin, in farm boots and German leather couture, read an unpublished poem by Hone. From the dyslexic's mouth flowed his words. We stopped, we sat and we listened. At 4pm, after refreshment at the local establishment, in the dead of winter three inappropriately dressed artists toddled off to marvel at the rocky islets and wildlife at Nugget Point. We reached the lighthouse as the light finally faded.

The crib we stayed at during our weeklong residency in July had threadbare bright yellow carpet and matching twin beds (and Asterix books). It was a refuge from the cold and from the silence, the absence. At breakfast we would read Hone's poetry and plan our day.

Drive–Lunch–Crib–Dinner–Sleep–Breakfast–Crib–Lunch–Walk–Edit–Dinner–Sleep–Breakfast–Walk–Lunch–Crib–Edit–Dinner–Sleep–Breakfast–Crib–Lunch–Drive–Walk–Dinner–Sleep–Breakfast–Drive–Lunch–Drive–Dinner–Sleep–Walk–Crib–Lunch–Drive. Insert surf-, star- and moon-gazing and snooze at random intervals.

Early mornings were spent crawling amongst the mould and concrete dust at the crib, looking for clues, artifacts to archive. We were forensic foragers searching for answers to questions not fully formulated. We were just collecting and collating data. As the week wore on, not one of us felt closer to unearthing what we were truly looking for until one morning over coffee (in borrowed china from the church) we realised that we were looking at his life backwards, from where it ended. There is a peace to Kaka Point; there is nothing but the sea and the bush. Hone Tuwhare spent the last 16 years of his life in two rooms. In a crib in a seaside hamlet surrounded by locals who would stack your wood, find you some kai moana when you were past collecting it yourself, but understanding that they should leave you alone to concentrate on your work, your words.

I stoked the fire and relished the company of the dog, calling her into bed for cuddles, and each night as I drifted into that in-between place Ted would read to me.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.



Figure 9.

On the last day, after listening intently to stories from locals – but mostly utterances on the legend and secondhand stories from those who will never be locals – we decided to send him a postcard. Addressed to Hone Tuwhare, care of The Kaka Point Tea Rooms Postal Service, “You are not here.” We are still waiting for a reply. A ‘return to sender.’ A ‘not at this address.’

It wasn’t until we had returned from the residency, unpacked and downloaded that K.O.P and I went looking for the man and found him in a handwritten letter that was held at Dunedin’s Hocken Library and only brought out at the discretion of the head librarian. In a room with perfectly controlled temperature, equipped with only a pencil and an iPhone, we sat at tables that could not be moved and fingered through his personal correspondence. There in a museum grey manila folder we found him. One letter in particular; penned in both Maori and English, moved us beyond words. We sat and we smiled at each other. We had found the poet in the archive.



Figure 10

There in a completely controlled environment, devoid of visual decoration or distraction bar the building itself, I had found what I had been seeking through my lens. Art did not belong here in this chamber of fluorescent light – it was restricted to the stairwell and the upstairs area – but here in Hone's beautiful prose, the linked script, we had at last found the reason for crawling around in the dust and the mould of Kaka Point.

#### THE DARK LIGHT ART COLLECTIVE

**Ted Whitaker** is a new media artist based in Dunedin, Aotearoa. He holds a BFA and is an MFA candidate at the Dunedin School of Art where he also teaches in the Photography and Electronic Arts Studio. His research and current art practice involves augmented reality technology and combining 'new' and 'old' media, with emphasis on the device/object and screen interface. Ted exhibits locally and internationally in cinema, project galleries and mobile

phone apps. He is the curator of two Dunedin art galleries, BRUCE and V-Space. He is also the curator of DART Collective (Dunedin Augmented Reality Arts) and editor of Black Wax surf culture zine. Ted has been a member of the Aotearoa Digital Arts Board since 2013.

**Kristin O'Sullivan Peren** is a multi-media artist whose practice responds to extremities of land, language and object. Her work has developed from her background as a printmaker; the materials and processes of which are evident in her methodology. Recent large-scale projects have embraced photographic, sculptural and electronic media, utilising both digital and analogue technologies. She exhibits locally and internationally in public spaces, contemporary project galleries and at artist residency communities here and overseas. Recent large-scale exhibitions have integrated innovative technology pioneered by O'Sullivan Peren using LED lighting and cast resin. Her work reflects a search for the Modern Sublime through technology, for a contemporary response to ecological concerns, and for identity in postcolonial New Zealand.

**Rachel Hope Allan** holds an MFA from the Dunedin School of Art, where she now lectures in the Photography and Electronic Arts Studio. Her research and current art practice extends through a weighted photographic history with an emphasis on contemporary outputs in chemical and digital processes. Allan's MFA exhibition, "Shall I Knit You One?," showcased a body of work encompassing a unique survey of photographic techniques including tintypes, large-format Polaroids and Appography. Allan exhibits locally and internationally in public museums, project galleries and artist-run spaces.

A resident of Hawea Flat since 1996, **Robyn Bardas** is currently studying towards an MFA at the Dunedin School of Art. Originally from Melbourne, she gained a Bachelor of Fine Art (Painting) from RMIT in 1989, and has regularly exhibited in painting, video, performance, theatre, photography and mixed media.

| <http://honetuwhare.org.nz/hone-tuwhare-charitable-trust>.