

The Physics Room is proud to present Still, Like Air, I'll Rise, an exhibition developed by ST PAUL St Gallery, AUT.

Curated by Abby Cunnane and Charlotte Huddleston

First shown at ST PAUL St Gallery, AUT, 24 February – 31 March 2017

Still, Like Air, I'll Rise

◀ ST PAUL ST



**Hannah Brontë, Skawennati, Esther Ige, Lisa Reihana,
Salote Tawale, Leafa Wilson & Olga Krause**

Curated by Abby Cunnane and Charlotte Huddleston

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Artist Biographies

Hannah Brontë is a multi-disciplinary artist based in Brisbane, Australia. Working across film, performance, fashion and photography Brontë's work is often politically charged exploring issues of indigeneity and feminism. Employing the aesthetics and slang of hip-hop, Brontë's *Still I Rise* explores forms of resistance practiced by women and First Nations people around the world. The video work's debut was as part of the Next Wave Festival in 2016.

Skawennati Fragnito, born in Kahnawake Mohawk Territory, lives and works in Montreal, Canada. Best known for new media projects, her work addresses history, the future and change particularly as they relate to indigenous cultures. Skawennati is one of the first recipients of the First People's Curatorial Residency grant, established in 1997 by the Canada Council for the Arts. In 2015, she represented Canada at the Biennial of the Americas.

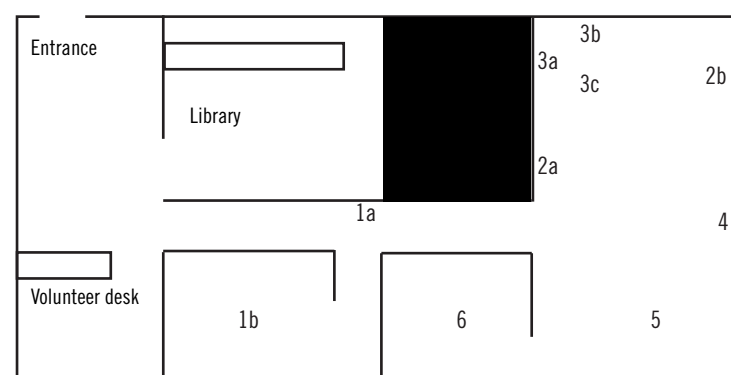
Lisa Reihana (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Hine, Ngāi Tu) works primarily in photography and film and has exhibited in significant national and international exhibitions including the Havana Biennale, the Brooklyn Museum, the Liverpool Biennale, the Noumea Biennale, the 12th Biennale of Sydney, and the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane. Reihana was made an Arts Laureate by the New Zealand Arts Foundation in 2014. She was nominated for the 2016 Walters Prize and is representing New Zealand at the 2017 Venice Biennale.

Salote Tawale was born in Suva, Fiji and now lives and works in Sydney, Australia. Tawale's creative practice explores identity and cultural values whereby the self is represented through the performance of archetypal and stereotypical signifiers from popular-culture. Her works generally take the form of video, photography, installation, drawing and performance. Tawale was awarded the Arts NSW Visual Artists Fellowship in 2017.

Esther Ige has just completed her Bachelor of Visual Arts from AUT University in 2016. Incorporating archival video footage, photography and installation, Ige exposes the realities of racism in modern society.

Leafa Wilson & Olga Krause is a performance artist based in Kirikiriroa, Hamilton. Offering her body as a contested site, and through a combination of multimedia installation and performance, Wilson & Krause explore identity politics as both the colonised and the coloniser. She has exhibited widely in solo and group exhibitions and held artist residencies at the University of Queensland Brisbane in 2006 and the Burke Museum, Washington D.C. in 2005.

List of works



1. Hannah Brontë

- (a) *Welcome to the matriarchy*, 2016, velvet and organza
- (b) *Still I Rise*, 2016, single-channel digital video, 3:53 minutes

2. Salote Tawale

- (a) *Pocari Sweat*, 2014, single-channel digital video, 4:46 minutes
- (b) *Sometimes you make me nervous and then i know we are supposed to sit together for a long time*, 2017, video installation, 10:00 minutes

3. Esther Ige

Even though, 2017

- (a) digital video: 3:10 minutes
- (b) *Selma to Montgomery March archival recording (March 1965)*: 1:09 minutes. Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration.
- (c) manila rope, 8 metres

4. Lisa Reihana

Wog Features, 1990, single-channel video, 7:50 minutes, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki purchased 2005

5. Leafa Wilson & Olga Krause

Unprotected #2: This ain't no disco, 2017, mixed media

6. Skawennati

Time Traveller™, 2008–2013, Machinima single-channel video, 75:00 minutes (comprised of nine episodes playing consecutively)

Still, Like Air, I'll Rise

Hannah Brontë, Skawennati, Esther Ige, Lisa Reihana, Salote Tawale, Leafa Wilson & Olga Krause

Curated by Abby Cunnane and Charlotte Huddleston

There is an element of triumph in every gesture of defiance. “But still, like air, I'll rise” wrote Maya Angelou in 1978. Writing of resilience under oppression, she is speaking for her race and gender in an address of historical and structural oppression of Black Americans. Angelou’s is a “confident voice of strength that recognizes its own power and will no longer be pushed into passivity.”¹ It’s an attitude of powerful dissent that the works in this exhibition have in common. The title is twice borrowed; from Angelou and from Hannah Brontë, whose work *Still I Rise* (2016) imagines an Indigenous women of colour parliament in Australia, through a rap music video. Brontë’s and the other works in this exhibition have no patience for generalising rhetoric around ‘making change’. Rather each attends to its specific social-political context, and the gestures are direct.

Lisa Reihana’s *Wog Features* (1990) was made at a time when identity politics were in the foreground of contemporary art. This was also a time when biculturalism was prominent in political discussions around nationhood in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Wog Features* was made between 1988 and 1990, in Australia and Aotearoa, a period in which the Australian Bicentenary (1988) and the Sesquicentenary (1990) in Aotearoa were commemorated, generating many acts of protest against colonisation and its legacies, as well as feel-good celebrations of nationhood. These events amplified tensions and discussions around settler colonialism and Indigenous rights in both countries. Reihana has spoken of the continuing currency of many of the concerns raised in the work, racism primary among these. Revisiting *Wog Features* 27 years after it was made, and taking the work as a starting point, this exhibition acknowledges the tone of defiance surfacing again in a series of contemporary works, and sets out to amplify this by bringing these voices together.

The works in *Still, Like Air, I'll Rise* do not revise history; they remember it differently and at times set propositions for alternative futures into action. Skawennati’s *Time Traveller™* (2008-2013) appropriates the forms of virtual reality game *Second Life* and those of the contemporary museum industry. Set in 2121, *Time Traveller™* offers viewers the opportunity to ‘embody’ the narratives of First Nations history, at the same time as participating in a form of world making that looks to the future. Skawennati writes, “I was thinking about native people and our presence [in cyberspace], and our lack of presence in the future and how people don’t see us in the future. Even we native people don’t seem to see ourselves in the future.”² Here the ‘history industry’, which often fetishises the stories of colonial domination, is adopted and set on an alternate course.

Also future oriented, Hannah Brontë’s *Still I Rise* addresses her question “how do we keep fighting if we can’t envision victory?”³ For Brontë, there is a link between how the Australian government treats the land and how it treats Indigenous women: “The mining, the ploughing, farming, drilling and poisoning is continual and is metaphorically and literally linked to Indigenous women.” Envisioning victory involves its materialisation, performance and embodiment; Brontë “trickles dreamstates and alternative universes into reality” though her work and organised events like the all-female hip hop dance parties *Fempre\$\$*.⁴

Representation is reclaimed in these works. Salote Tawale’s videos *Sometimes you make me nervous* (2012) and *Pocari Sweat* (2014) draw on essentialising stereotypes, reproducing them as self-portraits in direct confrontation with colonist representations. Her body is at the centre of both works, while they also exist in solidarity with numerous others whose self-representation has been taken out of their control.

Working with specific moments in history, including popular culture sources, Esther Ige’s work in photography, installation and video engages with the racism that she identifies is still in the ‘blood stream’ of the system now. She writes, “There has been and there is normalisation of racism and of racial stereotypes in the media, and in popular culture past and present. Through my practice I look to bring about a discussion around the racist stereotypes that have been attached to black people, addressing topics such as criminalisation and the mockery of the black body, fear of black people and the immediate association of violence with the black body. I am interested in the political journey and the mapping of this journey through symbolic expression, gesture and stance: from declaration, to resistance, to defiance, to protest.”⁵

Unprotected #1: This ain’t no disco, by Leafa Wilson & Olga Krause, was (in the context of the ST PAUL St Gallery iteration of this exhibition) the first in a series of built and inhabited structures that establish protection from the conventions Western art, holding ground in the gallery. Wilson & Krause’s work often takes place in institutional spaces, and in this sense is directly responsive to the structural inequities that often exist there, and to the need as artists and curators to find habitable positions ‘within’ such institutional systems. Reference to intellectual battle fatigue and grief is implicit and constant in the breadth of their work; they write, “Tired of everything. Tired of the white cube culture wars, tired of fighting for causes, tired of art.”⁶ The work’s title refers to Talking Heads’ lyrics, from *Life During Wartime* (1979) “this ain’t no party, this ain’t no disco, this ain’t no fooling around. No time for dancing, or lovey dovey, I ain’t got time for that now.” As the artist asserts, “[We] are one person but the performative use of legal and married names extends this resistance: the black body of Leafa Wilson colonises the German name Olga Krause, always claiming her piece of ‘white space’.”

There is a second image in Angelou’s refrain: ‘Still, like dust, I'll rise.’ Dust rises after dancing, or a fight. It doesn’t go away easily but rather lingers as grit in the eyes of those who either consciously or unconsciously maintain a broken system and its violent inequalities. Dust is infinitely widely dispersed; it rises, rises, rises.

¹ Carol Neubauer ‘Maya Angelou: Self and a Song of Freedom in the Southern Tradition’ in *Southern Women Writers: The New Generation*, Tonette Bond Inge, ed. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press (1990) pp. 1–12.

² <http://www.cbc.ca/newsblogs/arts/the-buzz/2013/10/machinima-art-series-revisits-oka-crisis-moments-in-native-history.html>

³ Email correspondence with the artist September 2016.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Email correspondence with the artist October 2016.

⁶ Email correspondence with the artist September 2016.

Pēnei me te āngi, ka ara ake ahau

Nā Hannah Brontë, rātou ko Skawennati, ko Esther Ige, ko Lisa Reihana, ko Salote Tawale, ko Leafa Wilson rāua ko Olga Krause

He āhuatanga toa anō kei roto i te whakatumatuma. Nā Maya Angelou te kōrero nei i tuhi i te tau 1978, “Pēnei me te āngi, ka ara ake ahau”. He kōrero whakatumatuma i puta i te aupēhitanga, he kōrero mō tōna anō momo me tōna ira me te aupēhi ā-hītori, ā-ture anō hoki i ngā Mangumangu o Amerika. He reo māia tō Angelou e mōhio ana ki tōna anō mana, e kore hoki e whakaae kia whakangūtia.”¹ He ātete, he whakatumatuma kei roto, ā, he pērā anō ngā mahi o tēnei whakaaturanga. Kua tuaruatia ngā kupu nei a Angelou e Hannah Bronte, ā, kei roto i tāna mahi *Still I Rise* (2016) tētahi wahine taketake i te paremata o Ahitereiria, he ataata pao. Kāore ā Brontë me ērā atu mahi o tēnei whakaaturanga i te aroha atu ki ngā kupu whakapaipai mō te ‘panonitanga’. Engari, e hāngai tika tonu atu ana tēnā me tēnā ki tōna anō tirohanga ā-tōrangapū.

I hangaia ai tā Lisa Reihana mahi *Wog Features* (1990) i te wā e tutū ake ana te puehu e pā ana ki ngā take tuakiri i roto i ngā mahi toi o nāianeī. I tēnei wā i te kaha hoki te kōrerotia o te ahurearuatanga me te tuakiritanga o Aotearoa. He mea hanga a *Wog Features* i waenganui i te tau 1988 me te tau 1990 i Ahitereiria me Aotearoa. Ko te wā tēnei i whakanuia ai te rua rautau o Ahitereiria (1988) me te kotahi rau rima tekau tau o Aotearoa (1990), he nui te mautohe i ara ake i ēnei huritau mō te aupēhitanga a te Pākehā me ōna waihotanga mai, ā, waihoki i haere anō ko ngā whakanui. Nā ēnei pāpono i ara ake ai ngā raruraru me ngā kōrero mō te aupēhitanga a te Pākehā me ngā mōtika iwi taketake i ngā whenua e rua. Kua kōrero a Reihana ki te haere tonutanga o ngā raruraru nei kei roto i tana mahi, ko te kaikiri te matua. Nā te whakahoki mai i te *Wog Features* e 27 tau ki muri nei me te waiho mai hei tīmatanga ake i kitea ai ngā āhuatanga whakatumatuma e puta mai ana i ngā whakaputanga mahi toi o nāianeī, i whai anō ai ki te whakakotahi mai i ēnei mahi.

Kāore ngā mahi o *Pēnei me te āngi, ka ara ake ahau* e whai ana ki te whakahou i ngā kōrero o mua, engari kē he whakamaumahara te mahi, ā, he whakarite ara hōu anō ki te āpōpō. Kua tangohia e Skawennati i tana mahi *Time Traveller™* (2008-2013) ngā āhua o te kēmu au mariko o *Second Life* me ērā o te ahumahi whare pupuri taonga o nāianeī. Ko te tau 2121 te tau, ko tā *Time Traveller™* he tuku i te kaimātai ki te whakatinana i ngā pakiwaitara o Ngā Iwi Taketake, me te whai wāhi atu anō ki tētahi ao e anga ana ki te āpōpō. Hei tā Skawennati, “I te whakaaro au ki te iwi taketake me tō tātou noho [i te ao hononga rorohiko] me tō mātou kore whai wāhi atu ki te āpōpō, kāore hoki tātou e kitea e ētahi atu i te āpōpō. Tae atu ki a tātou anō.”² I konei kua tīkina te ‘ahumahi hītori’ e kaha ana ki te whakapōriro i ngā kōrero mō ngā tāmitanga a iwi kē, ā, kua whakaritea mai hoki he ara hōu.

Kei te hāngai hoki te āpōpō, e mea ana te pātai a Hannah Brontë’s i tana kōrero *Still I Rise* “me pēwhea e whawhai tonu ai, inā hoki kāore e kitea te wikipōria?”³ Hei tā Brontë, he hononga kei waenganui i te pēwheatanga o te whenua me te hunga wāhine taketake: “Te kerī waro, te parau, te ahuhenua, te kerikeri, te paitini, katoa katoa e pā tonu atu ana ki te hunga wāhine taketake.” E kitea ai te wikipōria me whakatinana mai; ko tā Brontë “he whakatinana i ngā moemoeā” mā roto mai i āna mahi me ngā pāpono nāna i whakahaere pēnei me te rōpū kanikani hipihopa wāhine o *Fempre\$\$*.⁴ Ko tā Salote Tawale’s ataata e rua, *Sometimes you make me nervous* (2012) me *Pocari Sweat* (2014) he tiki ake ngā āhuatanga kua oti kē te whakatau me te whakaputa anō i ērā āhuatanga hei kirihāua e whakaanga atu ana ki ngā āhuatanga taipūwhenua. Ko tana tinana te kaupapa o ngā mahi e rua, ahakoa e ora kau ana kua riro hoki te mana whakahaere.

Mā te āta titiro ki ētahi kaupapa o mua, pēnei me te pūtakenga mai o ngā ahurea e paingia nuitia ana, ka pā atu ngā mahi whakaahua me ngā puninga toi a Ester Ige ki te kaikiritanga hei tāna e ora tonu ana. Hei tāna tuhinga, “Kua whakamāoritia te kaikiritanga me te kaikiri ā-momo tangata e te ao pāpāho me ngā ahurea o mua, o nāianeī anō hoki e paingia nuitia ana. Mā roto mai i aku mahi ka ara ake he marau mō te kaikiri ā-momo tangata e pā ana ki ngā tāngata mangumangu, e kōrero ana ki te mauheretanga me te whakaitinga o te tinana manugmangu, ki te wehi i te tangata mangumangu me te piringa o te tūkinotanga ki te tinana mangumangu. Kei te whai ahau i te ahunga me ngā take tōrangapū o tēnei haerenga mā ngā whakapuakitanga me te tū, nā te whakapuaki ko te ātete, nāna ko te whakatumatuma, nāna ko te mautohe.”⁵

Unprotected #1: This ain’t no disco, nā Leafa Wilson & Olga Krause te tuatahi o tētahi whakaputanga o ngā hanganga e nōhia ana, e ārai atu ana i ngā tikanga mahi toi o te Uru e whai wāhi mai ana ki ngā whare whakaatu. Tū ai ngā mahi a Wilson rāua ko Karause i ngā whakanōhanga, nō reira he urupare i ngā āhuatanga tōkeke kore o reira, he urupare hoki i te hiahia o ngā ringatoi me ngā kairauhī ki te whai tūranga i roto i tēnei ao. Kitea ai i ā rāua mahi te ngenge ka pā i te whawhai ā-hinengarom, hei tā rāua tuhinga, “Kua hōhā katoa. Kua hōhā i ngā tapawhā mā, kua hōhā i te whawhai mō te kaupapa, kua hōhā i te mahi toi.”⁶ I ahu mai te ingoa i ngā kupu o te waiata *Life During Wartime* (1979), nā Talking Heads, “this ain’t no party, this ain’t no disco, this ain’t no fooling around. No time for dancing, or lovey dovey, I ain’t got time for that now.” Ko tā te ringatoi, “He kotahi māua engari kāore e whāiti noa ana tēnei whakatumatuma ki te tikanga kawē ingoa, taipūwhenuatia ana e te tinana mangumangu o *Leafa Wilson* i te ingoa Tiamani o *Olga Krause*, he rite tonu tana kokoraho i tōna ‘wāhi mā’.”

Ko te roanga ake o a Angelou kupu e pēnei ana: ‘Pēnei me te puehu, ka ara ake au.’ Ara ake ai te puehu i te takahi o ngā waewae. Kāore e ngaro noa, engari ka pōteretere, ka tau ki ngā kanohi o te hunga e whai ana, kāore rānei e āta whai ana kia mau tonu ēnei whakaritenga me ōna āhuatanga tōkeke kore. Puhia noatia te puehu, puta noa, ka ara, ka ara, ka ara tonu.

Te Reo translation by Hēmi Kelly

¹ Carol Neubauer ‘Maya Angelou: Self and a Song of Freedom in the Southern Tradition’ in *Southern Women Writers: The New Generation*, Tonette Bond Inge, ed. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press (1990) pp. 1–12.

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