

***Salt of the Earth***  
Melissa Macleod  
5 – 18 December 2017  
5 Linwood Avenue

**Thank you to our supporters!**

Melissa and The Physics Room would like to thank LINZ for their help securing an appropriate site, SCAPE Public Art for their guidance in the early stages of the project, Fulton Hogan for their donation of sand and its transportation, RMD New Zealand and Charter Transport for their time and resources in creating the formwork, In Good Form for their expertise and advice, Kenneally Timber for their generosity in supplying timber, Linwood Rugby Club for their help building the work, Signtech for their assistance with the signage and, of course, to all the people who volunteered their time to make this work possible. We couldn't have done it without you! Thank you!

**Supported by:**

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RMD New Zealand  
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Printing: Jane Maloney, M/K Press



*Salt of the Earth* in progress. Credit: Daegan Wells



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# Salt of the Earth

## A temporary public artwork

# Melissa Macleod

5 – 18 December 2017

**THE  
PHYSICS  
ROOM** CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

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*Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.* (Matthew 5:13)

*Salt of the Earth* is a major new temporary public artwork by New Brighton-based artist Melissa Macleod. The monumental sand sculpture will symbolically and materially link the east side of Christchurch to the central city. This latest work is an ambitious continuation of Macleod's practice, which has engaged with the coastal areas of Christchurch, particularly the environmental and social challenges faced by these communities, for a number of years.

*Salt of the Earth* takes place in the Christchurch Residential Redzone with the permission of Land Information New Zealand. The redzone could be considered a liminal—or inbetween— space that buffers the central city from the eastern suburbs. By creating a giant sand wedge, evocative of a doorstep, the intersection of Linwood Avenue, Woodham Road, and Avonside Drive will be prised open. Literally bringing parts of the coast inland, Macleod will physically shift the experience of sand into another part of the city. In this area sand becomes a loaded material, especially considering the liquefaction that engulfed roads and properties across the eastern suburbs during the February 2011 earthquake.

It is highly likely that due to environmental and human impact *Salt of the Earth* will have a very short lifespan. Reflecting the uncertain post-quake situation in the east side of Christchurch, we acknowledge the potential disintegration of the work and hope that it speaks to the strength and fragility of a community that is both determined and “trodden under foot”.

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**Melissa Macleod** (b.1973) based in New Brighton, Ōtautahi, is an interdisciplinary artist, working primarily across sculpture, photography, and performance. She has exhibited in numerous New Zealand galleries and artist-run spaces such as; the High Street Project, Teststrip, The Hirschfeld Gallery, and The Physics Room. Recent projects and accolades include: *gift of ghosts*, The Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu Bulletin Artist Page (2017), University of Canterbury Masters Award (2017), *Precarious Nature*, CoCA (group/ 2016), *Mass and Pattern*, Jonathan Smart Gallery (group/ 2016), The Sir Robertson Stewart Scholarship (2016), *Ark*, Ilam SoFA (solo/ 2015).



**Jamie Hanton: Can you tell me about the choice of sand as a sculptural material and signifier of a place?**

MM: The idea arose through looking at materials in my landscape, in my familiar surrounds and trying to pick one that had the most clout, that really pinned the work to the sea and to the east and then think at what point did that material sit uncomfortably? At what point did I have to take it away from the sea for it to be noticed? In this respect, sand was the main motivator of the project: it was a way to bring a marginal community in and bring some awareness to Brighton, subtly.

**JH: A major consideration for this project was site, could you discuss the process leading to the choice of Linwood Ave, how site affected the work, and why that was an important location?**

MM: If sand as material was the fundamental concern of the project, then site drove the project forward; it was an interwoven process as opposed to being presented with a site and then trying to make work that responded to it—it felt like a really give and take experience. I had a sort of ‘wish list’ of things that I was looking for that I felt would aid the work, or were key, and essentially finding a position that was an intersecting crux-like spot was crucial. The 5 Linwood Ave site was a symbolic location that signified a change in communities and helped with the perceptual transformation of the material from its familiar surroundings into a new context.

**JH: It’s interesting because that site is the literal edge of the Red Zone, it’s the marker of where the land becomes currently residential ... speaking of the shift in community, the making of the form itself brought in a number of different disciplines and specialists...**

MM: It’s a huge interest of mine to involve local community and industry. It felt right to work with a professional sandcastle sculptor (Asheley Elizabeth from In Good Form) and draw on her expertise as well as the other elements of it—the wheelbarrows were from a local guy—it’s a nice part of making, I think, is making those connections. I don’t claim to know everything about all that I do and I suppose I enjoy that I don’t know about some processes and I had to learn and work with people who know about sand and ramming and different sorts of sand and grains. That’s where the year of planning goes: learning about the material and the limits of the material—which the work did push, weight-wise.

**JH: It was all new territory ... I mean Asheley the sandcastle artist hadn’t worked at that scale before, had she?**

MM: No, no, no, so it really challenged people who do work in those fields. The formwork people (RMD), too, they hadn’t ever made something that wasn’t liquid concrete. So all those conversations are really interesting but I guess the number one challenge is finding people who are even up for entertaining the idea and then somehow developing a rapport that can carry on. And, you know, it was a mixed result of success and failure but then that was the potential from the beginning and part of the idea to some degree.

**JH: That’s right, it was always precarious. The whole thing was experimental on a monumental scale!**

MM: And that, too, was one of the key interests I was trying to balance: a huge, strong modernist form in sand. A wedge is a really symbolic, potentially divisive structure but I was playing with the idea of it breaking down and dissolving. Making something strong and weak, which to me really nails what Brighton is ... that was the heart of the work really to somehow personify that area in some way. The person that is Brighton.

**JH: Right, and that was the ‘Salt of the Earth’...**

MM: On a literal level the sand is ‘salt of earth’ but, to me, the work was more about a character. ‘Salt of the earth’ defines a really grounded black and white sort of character which, I think, is that community. But, I like that it broke, although it could have waited a day ... ! Yeah ... it won ... in the end ... and that was a really big learning curve: to use material like that in a way that’s not completely driven by you. I think it’s good if it’s give and take. It’s amazing what sand can do and it was important that it had those crafted moments as it broke, that it somehow wasn’t just a complete mess. You’re still dealing with the public and it is a confrontational work in that it is breaking down, so it still had to have some points of connection for people, otherwise you lose your audience completely, possibly.

That’s the delicate bit about the work—it looked like you could abuse it and, to some extent you could. It did crumble, slowly, but sand is a strong thing, it’s a mixed material. The outside was as hard as rock, it was like concrete and people wanted to touch it and test it.

And then it went: trucked off and used as foundation material locally. And that fleeting side of it is nice ... that’s the nature of it all. It’s a weird one in that you almost forget you did it or that it occurred at all, actually.

**JH: The idea of break-down is quite poignant in the Red Zone because it’s such a liminal space, it’s in-between everything ... it’s in-between what it was and what it is right now, as well as what it might be. The legal ownership of it is ostensibly black and white but the community ownership of it is much more grey ...**

MM: You’re right, the Red Zone is owned by everyone and coming in and positioning a work is potentially problematic but then the whole point of it, to some degree, is that it’s a political stand or a political voice, and it’s supposed to be supportive of that whole community. It’s supposed to be a pro-east moment. I don’t know how political people saw it as, but it was a wedge facing east-bound traffic. Orientation was key—and scale—that it was somehow overwhelming and confronting. The four truckloads of sand and all those hours and hot days and volunteers made this large-scale work occur. I don’t think it would have been successful if it had been much smaller.

I think, for whatever reason, it did feel like it worked well on Linwood Ave. People liked it and people liked something being there. It started a few conversations about the lack of work and the dead spaces that still exist. You know, the transient nature of it was key, if it had been this big concrete solid thing it would have been sort of gross. It’s a wilderness there, a beautiful area, it’s this big forest that you’re looking out to, yeah, you get quite attached to the site, don’t you?

It’s a bit of romance, for a moment. (laughing)



*Salt of the Earth*, Melissa Macleod. Credit: Daegan Wells.