

Surfacing

Emily Parr

31 July – 5 September 2021

**THE
PHYSICS
ROOM** CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

Surfacing by Emily Parr

Exhibition preview: Friday 30 July, 5:30pm

Exhibition runs: 31 July – 5 September 2021

It matters where you start. The first photo in this exhibition is of a group of friends swimming in Whāingaroa Harbour at the end of the day. They are on a research break, or a weekend away, or just a swim: the kind where you keep on talking, though sometimes someone is underwater for a bit, surfaces laughing and returns to the conversation from another angle. The photo was taken at the beginning of this year, and marks the beginning of this project, *Surfacing*.

Parr's practice has consistently been orientated by the ocean. The artist is currently undertaking PhD study, a process which, in these early stages, is guided by narratives of whale migration. Earlier in the year Parr made a trip to Kaikōura to learn about the whales and former whaling station there; some of the images in the exhibition come from that time. Others are of Sāmoa and Tonga, where Emily's paternal great-grandparents are from, and of Tauranga Moana where the other side of her family is from. The artist writes,

I went to meet the humpback whales, paikea, on their journey back to their birthing waters. As this part of the world settles into winter, they migrate north from Antarctica along the coastline of Te Wai Pounamu, crossing Te Moananui-a-Kiwa for the warmer waters of Vava'u. The whales I hold a growing affinity with have been making this journey since time beyond memory.

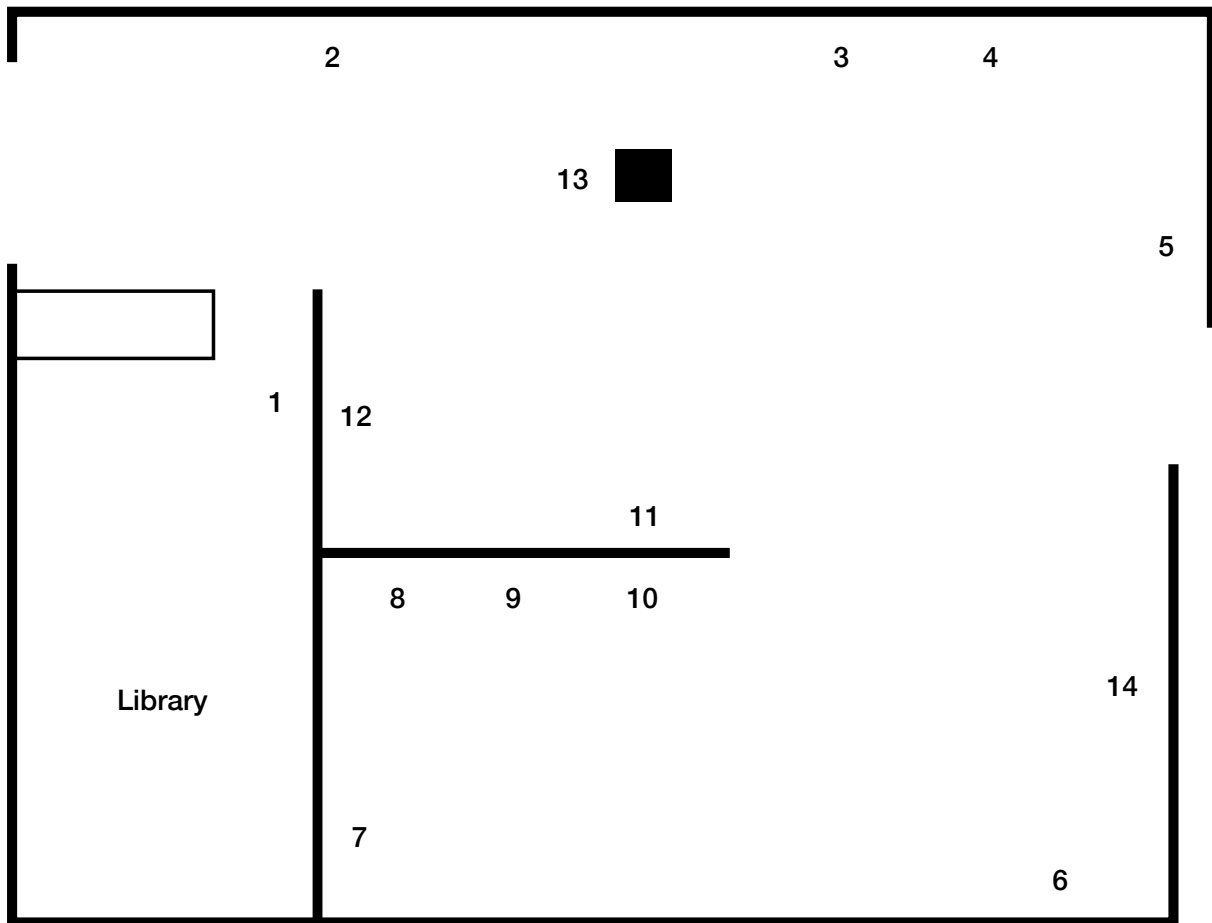
Alongside the recent photographs, two wall-based drawings reach further back in time. The first is a hoe parāoa (whalebone waka paddle), that was collected by Parr's great-great-grandparents and later gifted to the Dominion Museum. The second drawing maps waterways in Parr's whakapapa, alongside a toroa (albatross), paikea (humpback whale) and the Sāmoan 'oli (a red, scented flower). The toroa holds a particular connection to Ngāi Te Rangi, Emily's iwi, referenced in the words "He toroa whakakopa au nō runga i Kārewa, he pōtiki manawa ū nā Ngāi Te Rangi: I am a soaring albatross high above Kārewa, a stout-hearted child that belongs to Ngāi Te Rangi" (Ngāi Te Rangi, 2018). The arc of the toroa on wind, the deep slow movement of the whale beneath the ocean surface, the courses of water; these gestures also inform Parr's research process.

Recalling the first time she encountered a whale, the artist writes,

Maybe it's incorrect to say I saw a whale, rather, I heard it. There was no spectacle, no majestic breach—just a few whales coming up for air, like stones skipping with vast intervals.

In an extended process of research, when an idea or form finally breaks the surface, things can seem suddenly substantial, clear, euphoric. These images exist in acknowledgement of those times, and the necessity of oxygen, observation, remembering where and who you came from, in order to continue for the next leg.

WORK LIST



All photographs 35mm film (digital scan), 1050 x 700mm

- 1 *Whāingaroa*, 2021
- 2 *Kaikōura*, 2021
- 3 *Towards Lotofaga (Dawn)*, 2019
- 4 *Tongatapu (Full Moon)*, 2019
- 5 *Tauranga Moana (Dusk)*, 2021
- 6 *Tauranga Moana (Dusk)*, 2019
- 7 *Waiopuka Whaling Station*, 2021
- 8 *Fyffe House 1*, 2021
- 9 *Fyffe House 2*, 2021
- 10 *Waiopuka Whaling Station (Furnace)*, 2021
- 11 *Te Ao Mārama*, 2021
- 12 *Tiaki's Flukeprint*, 2021
- 13 *Hoe Parāoa*, acrylic paint, 2021
- 14 *Whakapaparanga*, acrylic paint, 2021