

World made of steel, made of stone

**Honey Brown, Josephine Jelicich,
Deborah Rundle, Isabel Wadeson-Lee,
and Daegan Wells**

6 November – 12 December 2021

**THE
PHYSICS
ROOM** CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

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Exhibition runs: 6 November – 12 December 2021

This exhibition is about making, and how it can locate us, consolidate a sense of self. Bringing into the room a range of materials—aluminium, rēwena bread and digital media, steel, glass, wool, and language—*World made of steel, made of stone* recognises making as a form of thinking. Further, works in this show invite us to think about the body itself as a series of relationships: physical and material, whānau-inherited, gendered and intimate, held in language.

Artists Honey Brown, Josephine Jelicich, Deborah Rundle, Isabel Wadeson-Lee, and Daegan Wells all have modes of making that are hands-on, and rely on learned and applied knowledge of their materials. One result of working in this way is that the works are not developed in isolation, but socially or in modes of correspondence. Learning how to work with these hard and soft materials involves exchange: intergenerational passing on of knowledge (in the case of Brown and Well’s work), hands-on and intuitive experiment with the physical properties of metals (Wadeson-Lee, Jelicich), editing and recontextualising for alternative meaning (Rundle), as part of the labour of resolving the work.

Kneading bread is repetitive, physical work. There is time to think, and intervals of rest while the dough rises, proves, and is baked. In some ways it is like an art-making process, with pauses for reflection, decisions made, and finally, if it goes well, something to share. Honey Brown’s interactive website, *Rēwena is...*, tracks the process of learning to make rēwena bread. Through the 2020 lockdown, the artist’s mother Katrina and father Dread passed on their recipe for rēwena to the artist across digital channels. The homepage of the website shows a series of dough bugs disappearing down the kitchen sink. A soundtrack featuring a sample from Notorious B.I.G’s *I love the dough*, a video call with the artist’s mother, and a number of texts—Instagram messages, Word docs, handwritten recipes—register the sadness, humour, and care in the exchanges. What you make relates to identity. It can be read as an extension of who you are; how you’re doing; who your relationships are with. “Always the first loaf for nanny, the next one for us, butter and homemade jam. Rēwena is memory”, writes the artist.

Daegan Wells’ textiles are made using wool from sheep at the farm where he lives in Colac Bay, Ōraka. This is felted in a process learned from local women of his grandmother’s generation, who have the skill and experience to take the wool from raw fleece to blanket, and to teach. The wall-mounted frame is made with aluminium from the smelter at Tiwai Point; the blanket’s saltaire pattern is like the wire on a chain link fence, or a farm gate. On the smaller work, stones set in tin stud the wool like rain. Small tin and stone adornments on the larger textile reference the gorse burrs that often snag sheep’s wool as they graze. Wells uses primary materials that have underpinned New Zealand’s economy since colonisation, and may be associated with hetero-masculinity, and extractive capitalism at the cost of the environment. At the same time, working with craft skills learned first-hand and a close-to-home method of finding materials, and reusing them, in this work a different future is projected, where the rural vernacular is slower, more queer, more spacious.

Deborah Rundle's work, in glass and text, recognises that the body itself is a maker. That is, before and after physiology and survival, the body is also a site of language, memory, identity, a holder of information. The suspended glass teardrop forms come from a disassembled chandelier found wrapped in newspaper at a secondhand market in Barcelona; the poem is edited from one the artist had published in *DykeNews* 1983, then aged 22. Recalling a lover, the text is both confronting and tender, and has the immediacy of smell, taste, touch, hearing words spoken. The evenly paced glass drops regulate the space like a form of punctuation. Brought together in this work, text and glass mark two long sightlines down the room, alternative horizons. You might walk while reading, read while walking, but also, while thinking of ways the body—everyone's body—intimately connects us to the world and others through sensory experience. Rundle writes, "rust pepper / tang again / in my mouth" and perhaps you, too, taste it.

Isabel Wadeson-Lee's work *In the void between fire and fire* is named for the poet William Blake's *Book of Los*, obliquely referencing connections between blacksmithing and creation. More generally, Wadeson-Lee's practice concerns the relationship between language and technology, particularly that of the forge. The chain, hooks, and rails which hold up the TV and banners are hand forged by the artist, while the screen shows a dictionary of paired words gathered by the artist. These are drawn from literary terminology, smithing techniques, metallurgy, the aesthetics of Catholicism. Often, they are words that relate to the body. Wadeson-Lee writes, "The last century has seen rapid shifts in the ways we speak and the tools we use: joint processes of increasing speed and distance continue to alter our experiences of temporality and tactility." That is, the way we speak, experience time, the way we move, are in turn affected by human-made technological developments. In this sense the process of making becomes reciprocal.

Josephine Jelich's work, *Cloudy day*, is made from aluminum, hand-folded and riveted to form a kind of slim box on the wall. The front face is wire brushed, marks scored into the soft metal surface. It is cloud-like, or fleece-like, like your breath on a window, or like a million tiny itches. Though this would be a difficult work to construct, and especially without tools, there is a sense in which it is also knowable, doable, imaginable, as mass-produced consumer items are often not. The artist writes, "It could be said that capitalism mystifies production. It can be hard to relate to mass production, as things are done mostly out of sight, and the machines are hard to understand. This creates a feeling of not being able to produce it, or within your own community, creating a distance from objects." *Cloudy day* is a work you can go close to, look closely at, acknowledging both the labour that made it and the specific character of the materials. Go close, close enough to touch maybe, but don't: the oils from your skin will leave a mark that becomes visible over time as it oxidises.

The title of the exhibition comes from *What a feeling sung* by Irene Cara, featured in the movie *Flashdance* (1983). The connections between movie and exhibition are slight, but they are sinewy: welding and dancing; the ecstasy of movement; labour and the body; sheer surfaces and skin calluses; desire and identity; paying the rent and wanting more. The movie is nearly 30 years old, Irene Cara is 62 years old now, lead actor Jennifer Beals is close to 60; everyone is older. *World made of steel, made of stone* is queer feminist reclamation of metallic, tough, tender elements from a problematic classic dance movie and a power ballad that makes the heart beat faster in your chest.

Finally, the exhibition is about hands: holding tools, metal and stone, glass and nylon, kneading dough. Useful, gesturing, ageing hands. Holding the rivet steady, the hammer, the knot firm to tie.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Honey Brown, nō Ngāpuhi, Tūwharetoa, Taranaki, lives in Ōtautahi, where they are studying a BFA, majoring in sculpture at Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury. They are takatāpui. Their work mainly involves using digital media to explore their own intersecting identities, and crossovers between cultural practices and their contemporary everyday life.

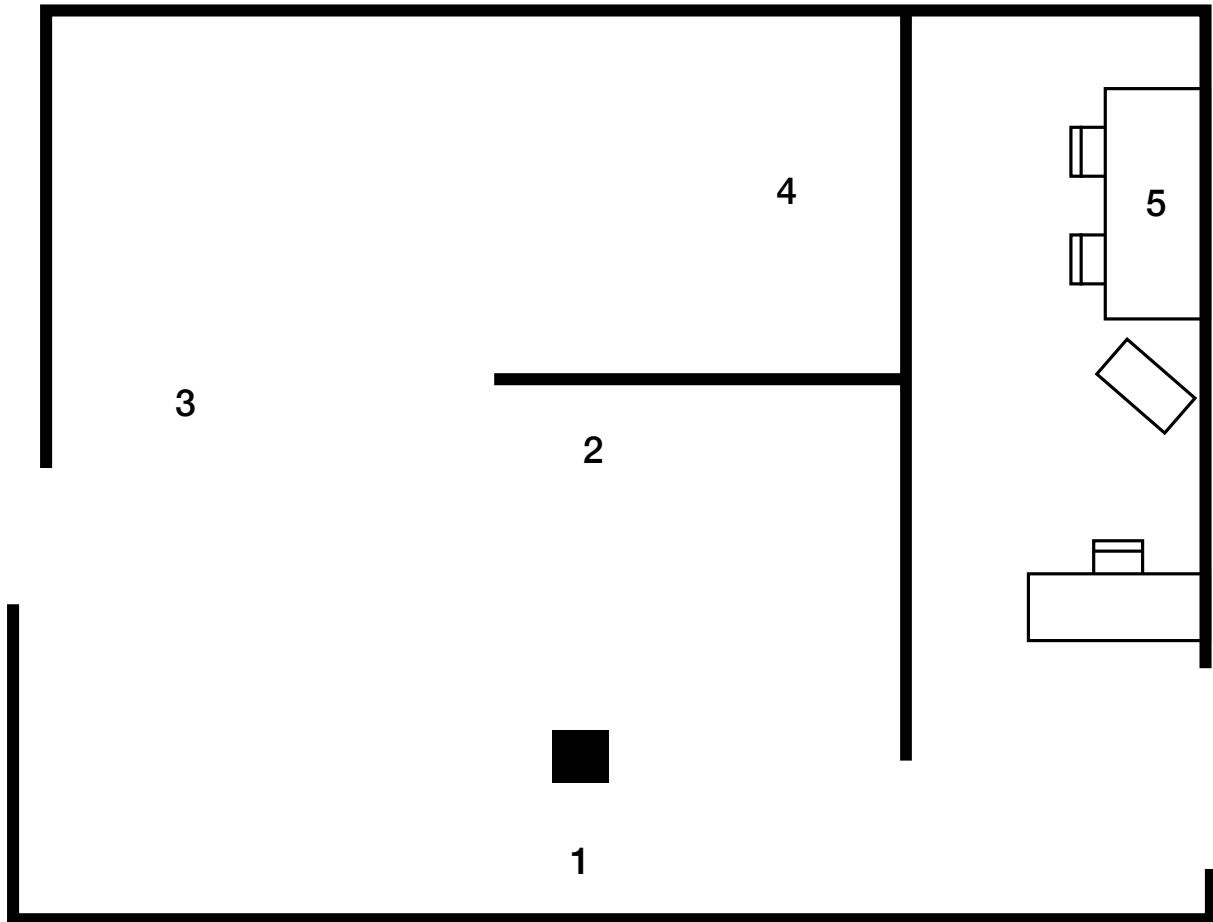
Josephine Jelicich is based in Tāmaki Makaurau. She graduated with a BFA (honours) through College of Creative Art Toi Rauwhārangī Massey University of Wellington (2016), and has participated in exhibitions including at 5hell (group), Tāmaki Makaurau, 2020; and *Happy Hour* (with Yvette Velvin), Precinct 35, Te Whanganui-a-Tara (2019). Her practice draws on observation and reuse of everyday, often industrially produced and cheap materials, and thinking around humans' attachment to things. In 2019 she completed the Furniture Makers' Programme at The Centre for Fine Woodworking, Whakatū Nelson, and makes furniture alongside working as a gallery technician.

Deborah Rundle is based in Tāmaki Makaurau. She is queer, feminist, pākehā/tangata tiriti. Rundle's work often focuses on slippages within language as a means of opening up alternative meanings and possibilities for change. Recent exhibitions include *On My Volcano Grows the Grass*, Parasite Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau (2021); *No More the Fruit*, RM Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau (2021); *How to Live Together* (group), ST PAUL St Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau (2019); *The Future of Work* (group), The Dowse Art Museum, Te Whanganui-a-Tara (2019); and *Are We Not Ready?* Te Tuhi, Tāmaki Makaurau (2018).

Isabel Wadeson-Lee is now based in Ōtepoti, having recently moved from Ōtautahi. In 2020 she graduated from Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury, with an BFA (honours), majoring in sculpture. Wadeson-Lee's work concerns the materiality of language, drawing causal links between the built environment, fiction and speech, using hand-forged steel and the traditional craft of blacksmithing. Her work *Wordsmith* (2020) was chosen as the 2020 SoFA Select acquisition by the University of Canterbury.

Daegan Wells graduated from Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury in 2015. In 2017, he was the recipient of the Olivia Spencer Bower residency award, Christchurch. Through his archival and sculptural practice, Wells uses narrative to address political, environmental, social and cultural events from recent history. Recent exhibitions include *Caught; slack and taut*, Laree Payne Gallery, Kirikiriroa Hamilton (2021); *Bush Coat*, Enjoy Contemporary Art Space, Te Whanganui-a-Tara (2020); *Start with a Vase* (group, curated by Sebastian Clarke), Hastings City Art Gallery, Heretaunga Hastings (2019); and *Catch* (group, curated by Becky Richards), Tinning Street Presents, Naarm Melbourne (2019).

WORK LIST



- 1 Deborah Rundle, *Sweet Pepper*, glass chandelier teardrops, adhesive vinyl text, 2021. The work was originally shown at Parasite Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau, 2021.
- 2 Josephine Jelicich, *Cloudy day*, folded and brushed aluminum with rivets, 2020.
- 3 Isabel Wadeson-Lee, *In the void between fire and fire*, forged steel, rayon and video, 2021. Components on loan from the Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury.
- 4 Daegan Wells, *No farm is an island*, felted sheep's wool, aluminium, stone, tin, cotton thread, paint, 2021.
- 5 Honey Brown, *Rēwena is...*, interactive website, 2020.