

MY THROAT/A SHELTER

Selina Ershadi and James Tapsell-Kururangi

27 October - 10 December 2023

Curated by Amy Weng

Mokomoko as tail-eater: a critical response by Joy Auckram

My throat/a shelter, curated by Amy Weng, presents two new experimental moving image works by Selina Ershadi (Iran) and James Tapsell-Kururangi (Te Arawa, Tainui, Ngāti Porou). Selina's film, چشم چشمه , 2023, is centred on her mother, their whānau and Iranian heritage. James' *Homman*, 2023, focuses on his father and also speaks to whakapapa. Together they speak of the struggle and beauty of life on this whenua, of a reconnection to one's self through the understanding of one's own whānau.

I kept revisiting The Physics Room during late October through to early December. On Tuesday afternoons, I volunteered to hold open the space for others, and at other times I brought friends along.

The blue doors kept drawing me in—ultramarine—the almost unnatural hue of a tuned in CRT TV's display, before pressing play on the VHS tape.

With Ruby: we stand in the space, enshrouded by silk curtains, each of us looking at one of the two projector screens which displays چشم چشمه .

Ruby points out a fish swimming backwards, I laugh at myself for not having noticed this before. One screen plays backwards, the other forwards, in a cyclical way.

The camera pans to the clock on the wall of the operating room, a symbol which is also repeated in James' film.

With Hera: we sit in the dark, in front of the large flatscreen which fills this

niche of the gallery. “Oh, the eye!” Hera exclaims in a whisper. James’ father sits in black and white darkness, side-on, one glinting eye centre screen, his face obscured by shadow. The camera lingers in this intimate engagement.

A gun and then a clock flashes by like memories; stills from *The Way of the Dragon*, the 1972 Bruce Lee film in which James’ father appears as a sniper.

At Selina and Amy’s kōrero: about eight of us turn up for this lunch-time talk with the artist and the curator. We sit in a circle on floor-cushions as Selina’s ouroboros of a film plays around us.

Diaristic and epistolary are two words used to describe her film which resonate with me—I have been re-inspired to journal and write letters to friends during my time sitting with this show.

Selina also talks of her relationship with her mother tongue, Farsi; her struggle with, and also love for the language, and her desire to hold onto those words she learns. The reason she refrains from using a written translation of چشم چشمه is to leave it to be understood only by those familiar with the language or those with a curiosity to learn.

With Hohepa: in front of *Homman* again, we watch as the father’s hands skillfully fillet three fish. The words HE TORU NGĀ IKA appear on screen. My friend mentions his time working in the fisheries and his subsequent injury there.

Other images from the father’s life play out: his homeland and fruit trees which he has grown, details of a painting.

Bells toll as bold numbers in te reo Māori fill the screen counting up to ten. I picture my young nephew, counting along with his fingers, shouting with glee when he gets to “TEKAU!”

In kōrero with Tyrone: I describe the show, he says James is his whanaunga. I have to laugh in awe, this man is related to so many greats. He goes to show me a photo of their fathers—first cousins, they look like brothers.

I share my poem with Tyrone, he is also a poet and very connected within te ao Māori.

I am like a child in te reo, but I cherish each story and new word I learn, repeating to myself and to all those who will listen, the knowledge of our ancestors.

I call my mother: the show is over now, she is sorry to have missed it. I describe the show and share my poem. Mum has low-vision, legally blind and also colour blind since birth but says there is a cinema in her mind.

Selina's mother is losing her sight and part of the film focuses on this. By her mother's invitation, Selina shot with her 16mm Bolex camera, during an ophthalmologist appointment. Selina mentions during the talk with Amy it was a difficult shoot, the camera's viewfinder obscured her own vision and therefore left the resulting footage somewhat up to chance.

Homman is in high-definition but shot in black and white which also offers up another way of seeing.

Both films are highly personal; portraits and recordings of whānau members and details of memory. They are also deeply respectful of privacy, not revealing too much of any person's identity. In this abstracted way, they allow for more imagination and invite us to make our own connections to what we see and hear.

*my throat is a shelter
for the voice of my tīpuna
ahakoa he iti
he pounamu*

*

*i retreat
into words unknown
basking
in kupu barely grasped
the sounds resound
oro in these bones*

*

*leaving your embrace
whistling and humming
echoing
words half understood
until we face*

*

*in te taiao
the harakeke kōrari
where tūi sings
the pūngāwerewere's web
a punga unfurls
by your awa
on your kāinga
or what's left
i see you
kanohi ki te kanohi*

*

*is this the beginning
or the end?*

*

*i take refuge
behind ultramarine doors
in a silk membrane
dark as te hinenuitepō
i contemplate time*

*

*ranginui is the face
tamanuiterā the hour hand
hineteiwaiwa the minute hand
ngā whetū are the numbers
papatūānuku the body*

*

*time is ripped to rags
a multiple exposure
of pūrākau
a whakairo
of whakaaro
and wheako*

*

*like a veil
time is pulled aside
to see mokomoko
eating his tail*

*

*kui is reading
her mokos kawhe cup
there is an ouroboros
in the grains*

*

*we look
to where we came from
to understand
where to go from here
ka mua
ka muri*

*

*i open the doors
te ao marama
fills this womb
birthing
new ways of seeing
revitalising old ways*

*

*the light is blinding
we stare
as celluloid dissolves
the fragments
pieced back together
remade
retold*

*

*is this
the end
or the beginning?
will māuitikitikiataranga
come around again?*

Joy Auckram (Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Parewhata, Pākehā) is a ringatoi and taurira of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa residing in Ōtautahi, Te Waipounamu.

THE PHYSICS ROOM

CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE