

When I was in year twelve, my physics class had a field trip to Christchurch to go ice skating. We were thinking and learning about the absence of friction. None of the numbers added up, but the *feeling* made sense, the push and glide, that heart-droppingly unstoppable feeling of movement, of being a victim of Newton's First Law.

An object in motion stays in motion.

When you sit down to edit a magazine for the year, you have to be unstoppable. You have to reduce friction wherever possible, have to remind your five staff writers to not go over the hours and tell your designer the same thing even though you know she'll have to. You keep the friction in your heart and let it burn when you clock out, swallow down the bittersweet knowledge you've kept that friction out of the *process*, at least. Reception is out of my hands. All I can do is let the writers push and glide and push and glide. Because the second they stop being objects in motion, the friction comes back.

Claudia Long's exhibition CHOMP at CoCA invites us all to consider how friction functions in our lives, how friction functions in our lives, as digitally lived as they are. Displaying select cut-and-paste layout pages of Earwig – an alternative student magazine edited by John Milne in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and published in Palmerston North and Auckland – Long transparently exhibits the intention, labour and the great, terrifying unknowns between first draft and final print version in Earwig's design process. None of it was easy, or quick, or assured enough to take for granted. In every glued-down image, every handwritten note in the corner of the page, each individually cut-and-pasted letter, there is friction.

The exhibition doesn't stop with friction though. It celebrates every success, each small miracle of a magazine Earwig produced. True alternative student news sources like Earwig are hard to come by. Currently at the University of Canterbury we have Canta, which is admittedly pretty mainstream due to editorial restrictions on partisanship, and occasionally the Memo, which provides an outlet for alternative, more radical and partisan views, but lacks resourcing and visibility. Neither of them, from this author's humble (yet well-earned) perspective, have chomp like Earwig did.

So – what is chomp, and why is it missing? What were students afforded in the 1970s that we no longer are? This is what Long wants us to consider. As she writes in her notes for The Big Idea, "The old physical craft of graphic design [– the CHOMP that is visible in the original artwork for Earwig magazine –] is now obsolete". She goes on to reference Kyla Scanlon's essay 'The Most Valuable Commodity in the World is Friction', which says our pursuit of frictionless processes leads to our systems becoming "collectively dysfunctional".

Long warns that this puts us on a "dystopian trajectory" which we can only circumvent by "rethinking analogue processes".

Outside of the page design, on which Long's reflection is based, I found plenty of chomp in the critical aspects of the magazine. At a time where fighting for peace was seen as radical, critiques of the systems that enabled violence were the voice of the counterculture. On one wall, among a selection of old Earwig pages, a letter from the Chief Inspector of Literature Operations in Australia, dated 1971, announces the prohibition of Earwig issue 5 for reasons including that it would be likely to "encourage depravity". To me, the act of publishing something risqué or critical enough to garner criticism of that degree indicates chomp. In our current media landscape, I think the art of chomp is dying.

I'm going to say some things that scare me now.

As the editor of a student magazine, I've heard so many different perspectives on what my role and my magazine's role is. Some tell me I have no freedom, others tell me this is the freest I'll ever be, creatively – my content isn't political enough, but the magazine is left-leaning and excludes half the students, but it's too non-partisan, and, and, and...

In the UC media landscape where there is one other competitive voice, and in fact in student media overall, with only seven outlets nationwide, it is impossible to meet the needs of every student we're expected to represent. Student media is reliant on funding from Students' Associations, and as scrutiny and budgets tighten, our role grows away from the critical chomp students were known for in Milne's time and we become part of mainstream discourse, acting less as investigators and more as a bridging force between students and already-accessible news. Palatability of magazines to attract advertisers is also a driving force of this shift and is usually written into editorial policy by Students' Associations.

Frankly, students in student media aren't paid for enough hours to deliver work with chomp. With high turnover rates in every role, from writers to editors, skillsets are developed to the point where there is enough intention and attention behind a writer's practice to conjure chomp and then are quickly lost with the end of the university year and that student's study.

So – what’s the solution? Do students like me have to face friction in reception, since our processes have been meticulously voided of it in the critical sense? Should there be more friction between students and the world, enough to spark new forms of media on campus, media with chomp, media from the underbelly like Earwig was? Should there be more friction between students and their students associations? Here I cast my mind to Craccum’s fight for editorial independence late last year.

I don’t have the answer. All I can really do is my best. But I do believe if we all felt more friction between our practices and the politics of the world, more uneasy in our complicity, we’d be one step closer to chomp again. Like Earwig did so well, if we can show people the friction between hope and activism, between peace and war, between comfort and disruption... maybe, just maybe, we’d start to see a shift.

pump

nobody is selling water i don’t have to boycott  
and i’m paid for my silence paid not to say genocide paid to educate through  
tight lips and feigned smiles and if i break it  
who will put the food on the table

because i’m looking after me and the world needs looking after and the kids  
need looking after and i need some water need to do the groceries need to  
take down the duopoly

need to stay quiet and call my mum and                      my sister is              thirteen  
and she is so angry  
but she says i love you over the phone and i can hear the mountains between  
us/my empathy is stretched                      thin over them

don’t get me started on the ocean.

i retreat to my phone for refuge.  
everything at my fingertips and i  
pay the price of convenience  
and a child’s guts are spilling out on a hospital table filled with shards of metal  
and a man has a bullet in his neck and a bullet in his neck and

i shouldn’t have got out of bed this morning  
but i have so much to do  
so much more silence to hold and silence to hold and

**Ella Sage** / *Chomp: The Paste-ups of Earwig Magazine*, curated by Claudia Long, COCA, Ōtautahi Christchurch, 2026.



Nathan, I love that you've brought *virtuosity* back into conversation! I don't often think about it as it's often something I simply feel. Reading Simon Dove's article made me reflect on my experiences of virtuosity. While I agree with his critique of performing arts' "*fetishistic pursuit of the 'most virtuosic'*" I cannot support the move towards redefining the term.

Virtuosity, for me, is in the execution of an act either from a performer or director and attempts to describe an ineffable, live quality of it. I disagree with the Dove's assertion of virtuosity as,

"the artist's ability to courageously and imaginatively respond to the multiple demands of intention, context, and engagement. Virtuoso artists are highly attuned to the world we all inhabit, and their skill is in helping us imagine how much better it could be. The arts can then take on a much more critical role in activating us all as individuals and as citizens – a virtuous role indeed."

For me it's misappropriating the term to forge art's sociopolitical influence which, I believe, it doesn't inherently do. It's more the case that it's the other way 'round. It checks out that Dove is a curator. It's in his interest to tell the tall tale of art's relevance and *critical role* in today's society. That's the sales pitch. It's aspirational. But this is an institutionalised perspective. This is the institution rallying contemporary artists – and their creativity and ambitions – towards this myopic and careerist perspective that they must now make work from instead of understanding creativity as intrinsic to life. In compartmentalising every industry and its workforce, modernity created gaps and the artist is incentivised to fill in the blanks. Dove's perspective lacks openness and imagination towards what art could be and is a pretty bold assumption of what inspires both artists and viewers.

I resonate strongly with Bebe Miller's reflections. I think she articulates how virtuosity is inextricably tied to liveness. How experiential it is. Where does one locate virtuosity in Dove's definition? When is it experienced? In the enactment of the artist's work? The process? In either case or in the sum of its parts, virtuosity here becomes vague. Also, don't get me wrong, I believe an artist, director, or choreographer can be virtuosic (i.e. not exclusive to performers) but it must come from the experience of their presence mediated through their process, craft, and/or their authorial, creative expression enacted.

"You get a sense of choices that the present moment contains. She communicates this physically – through spatial orientation, sequence of actions, gaze – but you feel it like the personal consequence of a tricky line of reasoning."

Here, there's something more universal, romantic, and true to the traditional sense of the word. It tells the story of how we first fell in love with art. How someone made a lasting impression on us. How we inexplicably find ourselves drawn to certain work, artists, performers. It doesn't exist alone, by itself, as a mechanical thing, technique, or standalone quality: it exists in the witness, "*about how reality is perceived, melding together emotions and senses and much else into an engagement with 'experience.'*" ('What if Our Ancestors Didn't Feel Anything Like We Do?' The Atlantic, Gal Beckerman) Virtuosity is more subjective than its understanding as something collectively felt or understood.

Virtuosity has historically been utilised to promote or canonise artists. That's how we get the virtuosos of the renaissance and classical period. Dove, as a curator, moves the goalposts, towards a future of celebrated artists he wishes to see. I understand his intent but it takes away from what might capture an essential sensation of the human experience. As a performing arts practitioner, I feel protective over such terms – rare gems! – that express liveness.

Bloody institutions taking the *dazzle* out of everything...

Greg Robinson AKA Mr. Greg: The patron saint of Christchurch hospitality – though he's far too humble (and intelligent) to ever accept such praise. Those that frequent the Astro Lounge recognise him as the best bartender in Ōtautahi. I haven't encountered any bartenders in my life brimming with so much charisma, flair, charm, and grace. He exceeds the virtues of hospitality. Anyone who has received a hot water bottle on a cold evening with some high-witted banter that comes as fast as it goes would attest to this. He's mixing three drinks at once while charming the customers so that the wait is not a polite interim across the bar but a live, electric moment. Each transaction is a moment of connection.

Other compounding factors towards this virtuosity: care of place, of colleagues, of customers, of community, of service, of drinks; intelligence (seems to know – and in some cases studies such things as sports games – enough about everything to talk to anyone about anything, “it's about making them feel at home”); short-term memory (hospo essential skill); super human senses (I don't know how or why but his visual and auditory faculty is exceptional); always on, focused, locked in (knows where everything is, what everyone's orders are, and anticipates/projects future outcomes). This list is not exhaustive.

Ian Eastwood: I'd emulate his style in dance classes, at Unitec and afterwards in SoundVision classes (a collective mostly from Tāmaki of whom I had been introduced first through Pat Godinet in Pōneke) at TAPAC. I would be especially interested in emulating his style to the contemporary dance context. It felt more creatively compelling. This became a sort of private practice of mine: emulating, embodying, summoning dancers I'd admire to access qualities beyond the reaches of my own sense of self and expression. I truly believe it helps in dancing, almost in a magical way. There's so much to say in articulating oneself through space and the space in time... I will say, picking up ineffable qualities through osmosis is a practice of virtuosity. Each time I dance it is in honour to those who have taught or inspired me consciously or not.

Rite of Spring 2013: Directed by Min Kyoung Lee & João dos Santos Martins. I saw it in 2015 at Bats Theatre (Pōneke) MCed by Chris Jannides. The show was set up like a boxing match and dance battle pitting different iterations of the hundreds of different iterations of Sacre du Printemps against each other. Min and João would embody different choreographies, Stravinsky's track would replay endlessly. A century collapsed in on itself in this one show. We'll never have the pleasure of experiencing the riots the Ballets Russes caused on that fateful premiere night, May 29 1913, in Paris, but this show invoked the turbulent feelings stored in the spirit of the show. Its relentlessness captured not the sacrificial virgin who must dance to her death but the inertia of history, of all the choreographers before who have, as a contemporary dance rite of passage, put their spin on this exhausted piece – ironically to immortalise oneself in the canon of dance history. I was ecstatic watching this piece. It inspires me to this day as a work of dance, conceptual craft, and research. I treasure the accompanied

programme/publication 'So you think you can dance to death? or The death of the authors', as I only have to flick through pages, perusing the essays, to recall the awe and inspiration, "enriching the experience of the Rite as a multiple, chaotic and dispersed work, as it truly has been."

### **Kosta Bogoevski, Virtuosity**

There are peculiar materials listed in Peter Deckers' jewellery. Simulated opal. Simulated rose quartz. Odd materials. Odd signifiers. It doesn't seem quite right. When did rose quartz need to be simulated? Fake diamonds, sure. But what about fool's gold? Even fake diamonds carry a slur-association. What of simulated rose quartz? What import is getting carried across? Doesn't quartz do something? Isn't it used in transmission? Timing signals? The quartz can refract in specific ways. They're used in watches, for instance. Think too of those crystal shops. That's a volatile medium. Just different vectors. Different outcomes. Blinkered. Another direction taken. What happens when you fake it? When you simulate it?

It's not really the point I suppose. Faking rose quartz. It's simulated. Like in Don DeLillo's novel, *White Noise*. It's a simulation. It's not the real event, but it's still blurred. When you can call the fire brigade before you set off the alarm it's called a notified event. Simulated gets at something else. There's a making-do ethic at play. It's simulated. We don't need the real thing. It's acquiescence to an age of obsolescence, to an age of excess. There's so much of everything it's hard to source the original. It's like a Dan Arps exhibition. There's a malfeasance of overabundance. The medium is the material. The confusion of semblance. Simulation in this sense is definitely making do. Actually, it's an everyday banality. The quotidian not as sullied realism but bountiful resource. We become keen and acquisitive. Stimulated.

Take the centerpiece of the show. A painted, rag-washed blue wall. Does it not look like that infamous photograph of earth as the blue marble? That speckled utopian incandescence. It's reinforced by the framing of the wall. There's LED lights tucked into the frame granting a fluorescence to the spectacle. From the frame hang a sequence of necklaces, each bobbing down only to be greeted by rings embedded into little orb-like structures. It's a set-up reminiscent of a cave, stalactites, stalagmites. One goes up one goes down. Drip, drip, drip. Slowly things accrete. This isn't a discovery of meteors and planets, of sudden arrivals and departures, of high impact, maximum velocity. No! It's a slow accretion, a slow creep of making do. Simulated rose quartz.

There's another telling material Deckers is using. The hard disk. He's stripped it out of the machine. Rendered it clean. It's just a small circular material. Perfect for hosting. Like its original intent. It's still a carrier of information. Just different formats. Actually, it's been formatted. Ultimately. It still carries ideations. In Deckers' hands the hard drive makes the perfect base for a brooch, a circular wreath speckled in mnemonic stones. This tracing of memory and material is also there in the necklaces, with their kumihimo braiding. They're patiently weaved together but this weaving also allows them to be ensnared with costume jewellery. The jewellery is bound in. It's an overt act of storytelling, only we don't have the code. Just the welt. Like a colonial landscape. We can see the story, but we don't know it. Deckers is keenly overlaying this form of absent storytelling, reinforcing the dictums of this galaxy of encounter. For that is what we are dealing with here. Encounter.

Deckers' exhibition is grouped into constellations. Each item is titled and numbered as a distinct zone. Zone 33 is the hard-drive brooch. Zone 1 through 10 is reserved for the necklaces. Each is buckled by its own unique hoard of costume jewellery rings. These rings are roused together, clumped into a semblance of order. They're bound in. There's an odd economy of scale here. Cheap costume jewellery that looks expensive. Braiding that looks cheap but is time-expensive ("more love hours than can ever be repaid"). These, though, are the maxims of the

bricoleur. Take, manifest, transform. It takes a difference in kind to magnify any hybridising arrangement. These necklaces are totemic devices. They trace an account of a world in the making. Like Wu Tsang and Fred Moten's mnemonic ropes, whose twisted and gnarled forms hung down from the ceiling, that add such a lucid tactile heft to their storytelling, Deckers' necklaces similarly function as a kind of roadmap. They account for a zone of interest, of an investment in time and energy. Not just a healing of, but an accounting for the diffusion of life in its many narrative forms.

Stock-take seems to be the name of the game. But it's an odd stock-take. As I've said, it's interested in different materials. Simulated materials. Rose quartz, simulated pearls. And yet there's also obsidian. One of the oldest materials. The first blade. The first tool. Obsidian is a kind of constant in the show. Like in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, how the song weaves through the time genres of the novel, each to their own, functioning as a constant fugue. This omnipresent object, the song, the obsidian. That in itself is a kind of mapping. What changes, what stays the same. There is also a utilitarian purpose. To take what is near. That principle of abuse. Obsidian sticks around purely because it is so useful. Like flint. Why not repurpose a hard drive? How obsolescent even now they seem. Aren't we solid-state, cloud-based? And yet obsidian is still here. The other day we learnt to light a fire with a pencil sharpener. Who knew they were made of magnesium alloy? Although I don't think every one is. It's not standard. Not like obsidian. Does diamond figure the same? The only time I think of a diamond I think of a record needle or those very rare times when I need to cut glass. There's a utilitarian function to these resources. It transforms them from currency to medium. Think of the way gold operates. How useful would that be? Is that why Deckers bypasses it for obsidian? Who would want gold in a post-apocalyptic world? Would you want a currency that nobody wants, or a tool? Would obsidian ever be a currency?

Remember that funny scene in DeLillo's novel about the currency of the rat? How it devolves. How it outpaces itself. How it becomes a health scare. The hoarding of rats. "The stockpiling of dead rats". "Pregnant Russian rats". Recall too how that billionaire also deliberately slowed down his elevator. Time becomes a new currency. And now in the news there is talk of off-line houses, people switching off their smart fridges, buying dumb-phones. There's real purpose to this movement. Not a fashion, but an acquiescence. It's a realisation that it's all too much. That it's all too far removed. Simulated rose quartz is trapped in the same cycle. It's not a refusal it's adaptation. The smartest kind.

**Hamish Win** / Peter Deckers, *Artificial Universe*, The National, Ōtautahi Christchurch, 2025.

Walter Benjamin's writing on Paul Klee's monoprint *Angel Novus* (which was entrusted to Georges Bataille before Benjamin's suicide in 1940, and Theodor Adorno after) describes the work's levitating figure as an image of the angel of history. In his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, penned early in 1940, shortly before his final tragic attempt to outrun the Nazis, he wrote that the painting,

“shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.”

In Taratoa Stappard's miraculous debut feature *Mārama*, the whakataukī “ka mua, ka muri” (often translated as ‘walking backwards into the future’) is uttered at least four times. A correlation between a Māori proverb and the musings of the Frankfurt School may seem tenuous, but they both indicate the notion of non-linear time. Becca Mestechkin considers Benjamin's remark that every revolution is “a tiger's leap into the past” in her essay ‘A Tiger's Leap into the Past: Walter Benjamin and the Power of Looking Back’ and writes that “to truly understand the present, one must acknowledge that the present is merely a resonating body of all of the past. The predominant identity of the present is thus a process in constant becoming.”

In this way, one can read this film as being outside of ‘time’, imperishable in its themes of mana, colonisation, performativity, cultural fetishisation, erasure of rituals, suppression of identity, deceit (which is presented in an almost fairy tale-like manner), sexual violence and, ultimately, justice. British characters may speak te reo Māori, but they offer horrific proof that familiarity with the language does not induce honourable intentions. The most petrifying films are those whose monsters are human. We people can be fucking abhorrent, as Erroll Shand's performance proves. His terrifying character has eyes as black as a circling shark with fresh blood in its vicinity. When Toby Stephen's character refers to Māori as “magnificent specimens” we know we are swimming amongst the deplorably grotesque fantasies of the Victorian bourgeoisie. Edward Said's words came to mind: “Every empire (...) tells itself and the world that it is unlike all other empires, that its mission is not to plunder and control but to educate and liberate.” Is this the Aotearoa revenge horror we'd been waiting for?

The film's sinister score verges on sound design and is the work of two composers: Rob Thorne and Karl Sölve Steven, the latter of whom is responsible for the swelling, cracked, decaying textures that evoke a very specific sound from Hans Zimmer and collaborator Benjamin Wallfisch's surprisingly sublime *Blade Runner 2049* score. Ryan Gosling's ‘skin job’ is flying back to headquarters through a deranged, nocturnal mist when we hear a stab of synthetic, abject, orchestral snarling brass. To designate this alarming sound, eliciting tactile chills and the thrill of goosebumps, as the film's leitmotif is a bold and refreshing move. Thorne is an internationally renowned Māori anthropologist and taonga pūoro artist whose sound brings nuance and subtlety to a film that could easily have caroused in the clichés of the exotic genre film. *Mārama*'s devastating haka sequence puts you in a state of sobbing, corporeal anguish. Movies that treat the audience like adults are always the ones that stick with you for life.

The film's dank, tenebrous atmosphere recalls the haunted Japanese horror cinema of Hideo Nakata, Kiyoshi Kurosawa and Takashi Shimizu more than any previous Aotearoa production. This is how I had wished Emerald Fennell's *Wuthering Heights* looked and felt, where instead we received a flaccid misreading of a deliciously dark novel. While the film immediately announces its 1859 Yorkshire setting, its palpable sense of creeping dread and claustrophobia is chiefly due to the highly aestheticised gothic mansion we, like the titular character Mary Stevens (*Mārama*), are excruciatingly ensnared in. The house itself is a beast and the film's (almost) single setting crept under our skin and never allowed us a moment of respite. My wife Hannah cried through most of the film, as did I. This could be referred to as a feel-bad film, but feeling bad can sometimes lead to a visceral understanding or clarification, which in this case lies at the heart of the corrupt establishment of New Zealand as we know it.

**Nick Harte** / *Mārama*, Taratoa Stappard, 2025.

On some world maps, they don't include New Zealand.

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That's something adults often do: disappear.

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If you're Māori or Pākehā in New Zealand in this neocolonial 21st century, you're stuck in a state of not-quite-being. For Māori, clichés become clichés because they're true: detached from language, trying to get it back; detached from culture, trying to get it back; learning your whakapapa, trying to get brave enough to say it aloud; maybe you actually have the mātauranga but you don't live in a country that's there enough to know what you know. And for Pākehā, not-quite-being exists because Pākehā ontology is not-yet-real, because despite the best intentions of large swathes of the population, the psyche of the nation is still attached to the idea of being 'a New Zealander.'

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In February 2026 I walked for more than an hour with my friend Sarah Lawrence. Picture the walking track: it runs parallel to the highway, endless concrete on concrete, one of those strange post-earthquake transport innovations in Christchurch that makes life easier but separates the pedestrian experience from anything that might resemble a city. I hadn't seen Sarah in at least a year. She just disappeared from my life and I from hers.

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Disappointment studies: offshore mining, tinkering with equity rules to make them more racist, tax cuts for the wealthy, rising supermarket prices, crumbling public



infrastructure, a constant stream of talented people heading overseas.

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Lorde was about to play Wolfbrook Arena. Even though Sarah and I both forked out the hundred-and-something dollars for tickets a few months earlier, neither of us really had the money to fund such an activity. If we were willing to walk, which we were, we'd save \$3 each in bus money, or \$11 each on an Uber. So it was a no-brainer.

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When I was seven I watched Veruca Salt on the television demanding a pony from her parents, and when I was seventeen I got intimate with girls busy turning into blueberries.

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When I first met Sarah, people were prone to mistaking her as a horse girl. We were both seventeen then, and, like her, my social circle was filled with recovering horse girls – rich kids with the leisure time and money to fund such activities. The funny thing about Sarah is that she looks similar enough to Lorde that you might as well imagine them as the same person for the purposes of this story. Sarah's a writer, and because of that, it's easy to imagine that every time I have a deep thought around her, she's thinking the same thing.

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Being from Christchurch is like the *ne plus ultra* of not-being-there. Christchurch is perpetually performing its shadow self, its not-self; it is performing versions of architectures that could have been instead of are. Christchurch is always-already returning to the swamp it was taken from and paved over.

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We made it to the concert on time, and it was glorious; it might be the only time I've ever paid that much money for a concert and felt like every single dollar was truly worth it. Lorde's songs had been, in ways I hadn't even realised, the complete and total backdrop to so much of my life – I knew more or less all the words; I was familiar with the way her music felt. Not just conceptually, or in the poetic realm, but in my body. But I don't want to talk about that.

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Left behind: the masochistic and/or stubborn.

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There was this moment on the cusp of arrival as Sarah and I rounded the corner to the arena. Thousands of people all of a sudden right there, moving but in such a mass they looked static, sculptural. When I zoomed in, I noticed these thousands of people were mostly seventeen-year-olds, and mostly large groups of girls, although a few groups had obligatory boyfriends with faces either fresh or sporting experimental moustaches. I'd expected the Lorde crowd to be older, my age and Sarah's age, mid-twenties, and when I looked at Sarah, I knew she'd expected the same thing.

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Becoming something is actually really difficult and the great tragedy of most people's lives.

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Lorde writes songs that never finish, never get there, and never get you there either. Her pop music exists in a state of disappointment and not-quite-being. She's less of a pop star than an image of a pop star. Lorde is a celebrity using the idea of pop music as a dramaturgy to create disappointments. In this sense, she must be our greatest living artist, because New Zealand, like Lorde's music, is a dramaturgical model for disappointment.

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Concerts are boring; everyone has the same experience.

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The thousands of seventeen-year-olds that poured into Wolfbrook Arena are actually a pretty good metaphor for my teenage self and Sarah's teenage self, all the thousands of people that we were, copied over and over again across the strangely endless concrete of just another suburb in Christchurch.

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How many times do you have to be erased before your erasure becomes so substantial that it's something?

**Josiah Morgan**, Reviewing Lorde's Virgin Concert at Wolfbrook Arena in Christchurch in 2026



On the weekend following Te Rā o Waitangi I went to see Kā Whakatauraki: The Promises at Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū. Last year I had the privilege of attending the celebrations at Waitangi with Asians Supporting Tino Rangatiranga; this year I stayed in Ōtautahi, but I wanted to dedicate time to reflect on the meaning of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in my own life and in the context of the city I call home.

Before I went to see Kā Whakatauraki: The Promises I dropped in to see Unutai e! Unutai e! by Anne Noble and Ngāi Tahu. This show told the story of the dire state of freshwater in Ngāi Tahu lands through powerful photographs of the waterways and the people tied to them. These photographs were accompanied by texts that shared accounts from the people in the portraits. The photographs were displayed in a sequence that followed the journey of the waters from their various sources, high up in the mountains, down to their polluted, toxic conclusions. Accompanied by oral histories speaking of governmental neglect, underregulation, resource overextraction, and unsustainable farming practices, these images told a harrowing story of the ongoing impacts of colonial violence on the land and its Indigenous people: the people who are tied to it and who are trying to protect it. Two of the gallery walls displayed photographic typologies: one showing various placards and signs indicating the toxicity of a body of water, the other showing the spectrum of toxic algae blooms. The different elements of the show: landscapes, portraits, typologies, and stories, created a powerful atmosphere in the polite silence of the gallery. The viewer could not remain a passive observer but felt their own experience folded into the massive scale of these issues. It was a truly sobering experience, making me starkly aware of my own lack of awareness and understanding of the freshwater crisis. It invited a deep reflection on the importance of understanding Te Tiriti and its history, how it continues to be breached and how this has very real consequences on the world we live in.

Kā Whakatauraki: The promises was nestled in He Kapuka Oneone – A Handful of Soil, an exhibition of permanent collection works, new acquisitions, and commissions, that examines how the visual culture and identity of Aotearoa is built through the relationship between people and land. This was a very fitting context for Kā Whakatauraki: The promises, which brought together ten Ngāi Tahu land sale purchase deeds to tell a story of Te Waipounamu that I had not heard while growing up on the very land of which they spoke. It illustrated how the Crown used manipulative, dishonest, and threatening tactics to pressure massive pieces of land to be sold for a pittance. Echoes from the mid-1800s rang through to the present day, the injustices of the past cemented in place to create the foundations of the city which I call home. The timeline which spanned one of the walls acted as a reminder of the history that I didn't learn in school, but in Te Tiriti workshops and my own research. I



reflected on how these histories are transmitted and preserved due to the monumental efforts of people fighting for justice and recognition, swimming upstream against a current that seeks to delegitimise and erase their voices. This exhibition made me acutely aware of how absent these histories of colonisation were for most of my life, and how they are often absent for many immigrants to Aotearoa.

These two shows reminded me that Te Tiriti is not some artefact of history, it is a living breathing promise: one that our family made when we moved here, and one that has consistently been broken since its signing. *Unutai e! Unutai e!* illustrated with brutal clarity the implications of breaching a treaty that was created to protect the people and protect the land. *Kā Whakatauraki: The promises* told a history that is so often hidden or ignored by a dominant culture that seeks to establish its own narrative as the only legitimate one. They were an invitation to deeper understand what it means to be tangata Tiriti, that it is something we must work towards every day, that it is a promise to keep.

**Steven Junil Park** / Anne Noble and Kāi Tahu, *Unutai e! Unutai e!*; Ngāi Tahu Archives, *Kā Whakatauraki: The promises*, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū, 2026

I caught the exhibition on its final day.

There's a subtle tenseness when entering a show as it's closing, especially one that marked the opening of this new space. An inaugural exhibition already moving on – pressed between the beginning and ending felt like the title made physical.

A Rock and a Soft Place.

A play on the common idiom, Joe describes the title as existing between hardness and fragility with each carrying a weight of their own. I keep thinking about this, not metaphorically but as a condition – not choosing either but moving between both this softness and rock.

Upon climbing the stairs, I'm met with that tall spiked form – Thorn from my side. It stands in the corner – to me it is the work embodying the "rock" the most. Erected, bristling, thorned. It feels defensive in a very forceful way. Barbs deployed. Chest out. A refusal of closeness.

But the more I observe, the less convinced I am of its strength.

Ceramics are breakable after all and the spikes heighten this. The more it tries to protect itself, the more aware I am of how they could snap off, bringing this piece back to a site of fragility as a soft place – its armour is working inwards.

And then there is the sand. It rests on sand.

The hardest looking body is given the softest ground. This detail caught me. The rock is being supported by something yielding. I can't tell if this is done to protect the sculpture from the gallery floor, or the gallery floor from the sculpture. Either option, a deal of care is happening.

The work that exerts hardness is dependent on softness to stand.

Through to the main gallery room, a gathering of vessels crowds the floor. They are titled with the show's name and subtitles that read as internal states: A Rock and a Soft Place (gut feelings), (heart and belly), (hole in my side), (proud and stern). Initially, I thought of them as an army, but that feels too organised, even hostility-loaded. They're not unified, nor threatening. Instead, they drift together like mallards, each vessel holding its own posture.

Some vessels hide into themselves. Some slouch. Some stand tall. The varying raku glazed surfaces catch the light of the North-facing window in a range of ways. Some tend to shine, while others look colder. To me, this alludes to there not just being one 'rock' or 'soft place.' There are many versions existing in these places.

Joe speaks on being taught not to be soft. Thinking about clay's transformation from flexible to rigid, I read these works as attempts at negotiating that expectation. Above the stairwell is the only non clay-based work, Pouring Out, a projected video where Joe features shirtless, without his face visible. He is cradling one of his creations. The gesture is careful and intimate, and it reads to me like re-learning softness through caring for his hardened creation as an extension of self. The hardened exteriors never fully erase the softness that lead to these formations.

I keep returning to this idea of place.

The show opened the space in Middleton – an industrial stretch defined by large warehouses and manufacturing. The gallery and cafe feel like a bright beacon amongst the concrete. On my visit, sunlight beamed through and warmed the surfaces of the works. Joe is based in the sunny, coastal Sumner and whether consciously or not, it feels like some of that energy came with Joe to fill the openness of this harder environment. If the industrial location is the rock, perhaps the exhibition becomes the soft place. As Joe suggests, there are many allusions within this.

These categories are unstable.

The spiked form looks like rock, but rests on sand.  
The group looks vulnerable but stands together.

The title captures this tension and the works stay within it too.

Seeing it on the last day heightened this tension. Clay hardened by fire, still capable of breaking. A gallery just opening. The show already gone.

The more the works attempt to become rock, the more their vulnerability shines through. And the more they expose this softness, the more I see the effort it takes to hold that position.

**Max Lowe** / Joe Furniss, *A Rock and a Soft Place*, First Floor Gallery, Ōtautahi Christchurch, 2025-26



Dear Oscar,

Brenda Nightingale's painting *Over the Washing Line (Ti Kouka)* reminds me of that Fanny Buss dress you paired with dirty gardening gloves for an exhibition then gifted to mum. And *In the Kitchen* reminds me of the one Nanny Margaret gave me after I tried it on at Pentlow. The straw-coloured silk one with burnt-orange, brick-red tapa-like floral pattern down the front and old armpit stains. Dry cleaners wouldn't touch the hand-printed silk, so I wore the stains to Grandad's funeral.

At a stretch there is a similarity in the colours of the paintings and the colours of the dresses but just barely. The colours are similarly authentic maybe. Real colour in a synthetically saturated world. The yellow of *Over the Washing Line* is old fashioned home-grown lemon yellow when you've only ever seen a meek and juiceless lemon imported from the USA. Everything afterwards looks blue-tinted because the yellow has got stuck in your eyeballs from looking at it so long. New Zealand imports about 1.2 million kilograms of lemons from the USA every year. And we export the lemons grown here. Ugh.

I've been re-reading *The Importance of Being Iceland* and it's kind of a horrifying prophecy. It's 2009 and Eileen is writing about running for president, islands, inbetweenness, glaciers, gay-bar raids, migration. Did they ever imagine things could get this bad? Is there anywhere left for optimism to stand? They call excessively ornate sentence structure an embarrassing working-class condition. They identify as working class.

I find language around painting can be ornate. Decorative in that it's hard to pin down in any direct way – there's too much of it and also not enough. But I just find it difficult to write about painting. Brenda's abstraction doesn't beg for any. Hamish Win wrote the exhibition essay and must have talked to Brenda as a friend. It's about her vegetable garden, the Canterbury hills and her relationship with time and Ursula Bethell poems.

I hadn't heard of Bethell. She started writing poetry about her garden at 50 and lived in a cottage in the Cashmere hills with her 'companion' Effie Pollen. After thirty years together Effie died suddenly, and Ursula burnt all but one letter from Effie and stopped writing poetry altogether. Canterbury University has digitally archived Ursula's watercolour paintings and a lot of them are very blue like Brenda's watercolours of the Canterbury hills.

Brenda's blue watercolours were painted around the time of the earthquakes. I was particularly homesick over those years both because I was far away but also because it didn't exist in the same way anymore. I carried the exhibition pamphlet with me from flat to flat, re-blue-tacking it to walls until the corners disintegrated completely.

Here's a 1929 poem of Ursula's:

#### Detail

My garage is a structure of excess plainness,  
It springs from a dry bank in the back garden,  
It is made of corrugated iron,  
And painted all over with brick-red.

But beside it I have planted a green Bay-tree,  
– A sweet Bay, an Olive and a Turkey Fig,  
– A fig, an Olive, and a Bay.

Like Brenda's new paintings it's spare and utilitarian and at the same time opulent sensitive rhythmic visceral. Maybe the romance is entirely projected. Me trudging through the straw-coloured hills chanting a *fig an olive and a bay*. As my own life on the same hills gardening with my wife gets closer, it's hard to fantasise about much else. A corner for optimism. I can't wait to be closer to you and mum.

If we could have Ursula, Effie, Fanny and Brenda over for dinner what would you cook? I imagine Fanny would be smoking at the table, but not me, I've quit again.

Love you,

S x

**Sophie Bannan** / Brenda Nightingale, *Fugitives*, Sanderson, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, 2026.

Paintings was a staging of 12 recent works by Séraphine Pick; four large paintings, six smaller ones, and two little monoprints. These portraits – nudes, skeletons, spirits – rendered loosely in oils, acrylic, casein and ink, evidence Pick's relentless curiosity and technical rigour. There is immense freedom and fluidity within her approach to image making – gritty impasto, watery swathes, urgent scribbles; iridescent pastels, muddy earth tones, electric blues and yellows. This eclectic mix of pictures is testament to Pick's expansive technical and visual vocabulary, disparate yet distinctly hers.

Despite their varied treatment, all of the works in this show share an hallucinatory, dream-like quality; source material is mined from the depths of the imagination, past the threshold of the self, rummaging through the collective consciousness. Looking at these paintings is like remembering part of a dream or an acid trip, but I'm also reminded of characters from Pick's older works and icons from Western art history and popular culture. The blue-haired phantom hippies in *Garden of Fugitives*, one of the four large paintings in the show, I recognised instantly as members of *Buffalo Commune* (2016) – a painting of Pick's which is set as my computer's background image. A few members have peeled themselves away from the group levitation spiral session to wind down in an autumnal orchard scene. Depicted here as mere suggestions of figures, this cast of characters slowly materialise through the act of looking – a pair develops into a cluster of six. Picking fruit? (Sun)Bathing? I can't quite see.

Reading the title on the room sheet conjured different ghosts, and for a moment I'm daytime cruising during lockdown in Volkspark Hasenheide (literally *rabbit warren*) unaware of its historical significance as Berlin's first Muslim burial ground, nor its contemporary reputation for murderous drug crime. The painting shares its name with an archeological site, *Orto dei Fuggiaschi* in Italian, where after 1,882 years encased in lahar from Mt Vesuvius's 79 AD eruption, thirteen bodies (now turned to dust) were discovered and cast in plaster of Paris.



Mind Lag is the most descriptive work in the show. A masked, red-haired woman kneels in the suggestion of a boat, the sun setting behind her, in a psychedelic sea of petals and geometric symbols. The picture is hard to make sense of, and has me wondering if Pick likes the same paranormal podcasts as me. This feels just like that one about the Norwegian girls being lured into a lake on a winter's night by telepathic orbs.

Offline, a small, clumpy oil portrait, read to me as a self portrait after da Vinci's Lady with an Ermine (1489-1491), a painting I exhaustively studied in year 12 art history. I wondered if Pick had been recalling scenes from her own high school art history classes while attempting to reduce her screen-time. For me Offline justified the inclusion of the two literally outlying monoprints, dated 2022 and hung in a stairwell away from the main gallery space. Looking at these works now on Lett's website, it's clear that one of them, Untitled (portrait), is a compositional study for Offline. This eases my suspicions that they were placed there solely as subliminal advertising for Lett's stockroom.

The last work in the show, Swathe, held the tightest grip on me. Hairy scribbles barely form a figure keeled over against a greeny-brown backdrop, which has the same treatment as a large surface area that's been coloured with felt tip pen. The figure was not immediately obvious to me, and I let out a small, impressed laugh when it appeared. I stood in front of this painting for maybe ten minutes, ensnared by the way it seemed to vibrate before my eyes. I left the show feeling kind of hypnotised, convinced that Pick held the key to something deeply mystical and mysterious, yet completely universal.

**Oscar Bannan / Séraphine Pick, *Paintings*, Michael Lett, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, 2025**

*vaporous, there, nearly, almost, not yet*

Laying *WITH* . . .  
Grain imprinting impregnating flesh.  
Smooth, blue, electric surface clutching soul.  
Floor sucks, ceiling draws.

Happens, happened, there, almost, nearly, not yet. How long has this been going on?<sup>1</sup> (*a rhetorical question posed to an orbiting mass caught between a tender embrace with gravity and the cosmos.*)

H heavy steel traps air, complying with its job to contain. Sweet stenching, sweating, resting bodies, breaths swallowing, expelling volumes. Laying so close — cheek to jowl — hairs prickle. . Outside is out there, not in here. But not really. In here, *WITH* dimness sheltered from unbearable lightness.<sup>2</sup> (*for what does it really matter?*)

Far from a refugee being ferried across political boundaries (for or against their will), in a container, in the belly of a boat, in the cargo-hold or tyre of a plane, in a suitcase, yet still, a sinking sense of isolation riddled with existential loneliness seep in.

. Where is this here-place?<sup>3</sup> Dear Beloved, how as the beam of this hologram reorganised the material particles of this body such that it now fits, belongs, settles in? Outside flushing out inside blindingly. This sky is not that sky, and the illusion of being on the water rocks our vertigo. Close your eyes to miss it.

1  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBMnGYCTBxE>

2  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Unbearable\\_Lightness\\_of\\_Being](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Unbearable_Lightness_of_Being)

3  
The phrase "In this here place, we flesh" is spoken by the character Baby Suggs in Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*. In this scene, Baby Suggs gathers people in a location known as "The Clearing" to deliver a sermon that focuses on self-love and honoring the physical body.

4  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ym3RlvVR9M>

5  
The phrase "falling up" generally refers to experiencing a positive outcome, personal growth, or success as a direct result of a setback, failure, or, paradoxically, a "fall". The most famous, direct source is the title poem of Shel Silverstein's 1996 book, *Falling Up*. The poem uses the metaphor of tripping over a shoelace to transform a "fall down" into a "fall up" into a whimsical, adventurous skyward journey.

6  
<https://www.scottallenwilson.com/lessons-from-ansel-adams-the-ever-changing-sky/?srsltid=AfmBOorRowyc90DUJtdGtEuYzxHP20ehZJKeW6-jvfaQnSehK4-1xeFK>

7  
<https://www.nziff.co.nz/2019/archive-5/koyaanisqatsi/>

8  
<https://archive.philosophersmag.com/5123-2/>

9  
<https://www.penguin.co.nz/books/falling-awake-9781784702687>

10  
<https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/sun-tunnels>

11  
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/nov/30/gordon-matta-clark-new-york-art-deconstruction>

12  
<https://rodencrater.com/about/>

To watch Sky perform is to rehearse the crackling fire seemingly forever broadcasting through cathode ray tubes made of thick, leaded glass designed to withstand a vacuum and block X-ray emissions, inner surfaces coated with phosphor dots that glow when struck by an electron beam.

Slow drama. Drifting. Theatre adrift. Planet in orbit. One more rotation, presumably a mantra. Spectacle or free entertainment or cheap imitation? It makes fun of entertainment hinged to slap-stick comedy and outlandish productions. Go out, go out, the sky is not a commodity.

Rock me gently, rock me slowly, take it easy. Don't you know that I have never been loved like this before.<sup>4</sup> Holding on to the gunwales, clinging to gunnels, those guns wailing at the surface of lapping water, being carried out into the harbour by the wind's argument with the tide and in the wake of the midday ferry. Being undone by the weather. A second, or two or three or more (*losing count but who or what is counting anyway?*) the skyward view chants a prayer to some kind of heaven designated for non-believers. Cumulus confronts Cirrus. Condensed vapour sliding over. Somatic sky sex. An overabundance of water, salty water, parches. A relentless sun stings when the intimate frenzy eclipses. Wishing, hoping, yearning, crying for an anchor, to anchor, to land, to forego the orgasm, to bid farewell with abandon that languid surfer's pose, take it easy. Falling up in to arms.<sup>5</sup>

A sailor that knows what it is to watch the horizon, calculate the wind, navigate rough and calm seas. To never bath in the same outpouring of heated colour boring and waning at that infinite and impossible fusion of here and there. Lusting. A gesture refereed by visible collections of tiny water droplets or ice crystals suspended in the atmosphere, formed when water vapour cools and condenses around microscopic particles like dust or smoke. Essentially floating, condensed, water made visible, water made heavy before it falls. "Cool voices of the sky" where emotion reigns over literal truth<sup>6</sup> (*it is all truths, eh?*) Listing.

Boat belly tossing. Climatic storms raging from the periphery, now here, life out of balance.<sup>7</sup> Cumulonimbus wrecking havoc with Nimbostratus.

Tempting to raise my feet. Tempting to push the artificial sky off its axis. Could be a feat. What thighs Tāne Mahuta must have! What guile to make space for light, to break apart embracing atua, to interrupt their dark intimacies, like that old pensioner chaperoning a high school dance. Mammatus swallowing up the screen, Rangī's grief spills, Papatūānuku's mist sighs. Their swoon vaporises. Narrative climax of tumultuous climates.

Laying *IN*. A forest, a tent, a cabin, a marae, the here-place where. snoring, love-making, tossing, dreaming live. One can only but stare at the ceiling, listen, take it in, contemplate the rafters, the ceiling fixtures, the heaving shadows, the moon passing through the olive trees at a similar rate as an onshore breeze. To wait with it. As long as it takes. Letting the grain of ground impress flesh.

What is it to observe the sky performing? (*how long before someone comes along to ask, Are you alright? Do you need help?*) It is to pass the day away, inferring some form of laziness, a lackadaisical infraction, a slough uncommitted to the vigour and rigour of labour, production, and capitalism. It is to wax poetically, philosophically (*as if that was not real, valuable, or meaningful*). The story goes that Thales fell into a well while walking backwards looking at the sky.<sup>8</sup> The deep resonance of that well might be akin to that of the reverberant metal container. Oh, to be accused of being useless! Oh, to lose touch with reality!

Fall awake. Falling awake.<sup>9</sup> (*dear Alice, language seductress.*) Why not just bore a water pipe<sup>10</sup> chainsaw a house<sup>11</sup> or build a crater<sup>12</sup> ? Because that would mend the here with here. Performing the sky begging for a here-place and there-place. Kei konei, kei konā, as if falling says goodbye. What is between them, apart from them, because of them. Why not just swim out, float up, and get carried away?

In the safe state of being dry, warm, sleepy. T emptying to roll over, and yes, likely to touch (*oh forbidden touching*)—another laying body, another live one — to muse on the multiple horizons of the timber floor, an artifice of ground. Catching, just before grounding, almost, nearly, not yet.

**Julieanna Preston** / Bikka Ora and Alexa Wilson, *The Sky is Performing*, The Performance Arcade 2026 Container Series, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington, 2026.

I've signed up to the working bee for Anito. In East Street Hall, Justin Talplacido Shoulder and Matthew Stegh guide us through a ritual made of funnels, bins of rice and fabric casings. When filled these will form the aerial roots of the balete tree, the *Ficus indica*. While grouped around plastic tubs Talplacido-Shoulder and Stegh talk us through the incarnations of their practice, their new life on Country and being parents. Over two hours the spirals of fabric thicken and twist into shape. Their weight works around and under my crossed legs. The roots press into the wooden floor. The set takes on a certain lifeforce. One that mirrors the inherent dwelling of anito in the soil, trees, water and the animals around us.

\* \* \*

A week later I'm running late to the show. In the car I'm trying to piece together what Talplacido-Shoulder and Stegh have shared with us. There is a sense of myth-making throughout their collaboration. The creation of new beings. The formation of past worlds. Less a reconstruction of a cultural practice than a transformation of it through the material present. It reminds me of Martha Atenzia's Anito I and II films, each documenting a parade that is part of the Ati-Atihan festival on Bantayan Island. This promenade forms a living document of Filipino life. It layers Catholicism over animist traditions and in a very Filipino way expresses political and ecological crises through subversive costume (a reminder of my titos in drag). What Atenzia documents feels like a fitting parallel to Talplacido-Shoulder's work. A complicated reforming of the past through the present.

I leave the uber at the intersection of Mayoral Drive and Queen Street and run into the theatre. Being damp with sweat feels appropriate in a space filled with birdsong and a simulated rainforest canopy projected from above. On stage Shoulder's form is barely legible beneath the rice-filled roots. The house lights go down and we sit in this state for a while. The couple next to me shuffle and the birdsong continues. Slowly at the edges this silence is unsettled. Pools of light begin to tighten, contract and pull across the tangle of roots in time with the now warbling synth-driven score. Bodies spill from the balete tree and its roots unravel, opening a portal between material and spiritual realms. Two performers become beasts lit in the sunset/sunrise of an orange light. Their shiny bulbous bodies pick at the roots they have just emerged from. Again, they transform. The scene collapses and a new world emerges. This rhythm continues throughout Anito, this continual building, transforming and decomposing.

Anlto is formed through an ecology practice. A rainforest made of set pieces, puppets, and bodies. It ferments previous works Aeont: Titan Arum, the Carrion series, Club Ate and Monsta Gras and allows them to re-emerge into Anito. Within this work, with these green tipped shoots, The Future Folklore Collective cultivate a terrain for a contemporary animism. One where new myths spill out of the baletre tree.

**Michael McCabe** / Justin Talplacido Shoulder & the Future Folklore Collective, *Anito*, East Street Hall, Auckland Pride (with Q Theatre and Auckland Live), 2026.

I'm not going to Port Noise this year, I tell anyone who will listen. We're saving for our wedding, I say. We're saving for a house. We're saving, I insist, arms making woo-woo motions above my head, for The Future. Besides, I continue, we can watch it from our place, our papier-mâché palace with the dusty mint pushing through the plaster, and a brobdingnagian rhubarb that won't budge.

No, I say, I'm not going.

On the day in question, I open my bedroom curtains and see the stage is set, as if overnight the waters of Whakaraupō have receded and revealed a ready-made arena, complete with side lighting and WorkSafe approved scaffolding.

I pull the curtains closed, go back to bed.

The Saturday market is even busier than usual. Hot day, cruise ship, festival goers. There is a stand selling Port Noise tickets, helmed by a very cool woman. Studiously avoiding her gaze, I buy a chocolate baklava from the Turkish bakery stand. I'm not going to Port Noise this year, I tell the vendor, so I'm treating myself. She nods, looks past me, already stuffing beef borek into paper bags for the people beside me.

Late in the afternoon, the low plaintive whistle of a pūoro winds its way up through the gully.

At six James and I wander down to London Street for takeaways – “We're treating ourselves” – and watch festival goers stroll past the window, some in what I call the 'Lyttelton look' (layers of black, cigarettes, disdain); others in thrifted outfits, band tees, jeans. People are happy to see each other. Maybe we should have gone, we say. But we're SAVING MONEY, we repeat in time



with our steps, arms full of burgers and wontons, fried noodles and chips, tomato sauce and chocolate.

It starts to rain. The cool shimmer of an autoharp washes over us.

At a certain point, the rain stops and the light changes, to the clear, clean light I have only ever seen in Te Waipounamu, so crisp I could reach out and trace the wrinkles of Te Pātaka o Rākaihautū. The cat and I sit out on the deck as the crowd's cheers reverberate across the water. A singer growls and hisses, stalks the stage.

Night-time. The hills behind us sleep but the party goes on. I find James on the concrete wall above our house, the one that is definitely not earthquake safe but gives us the best view. From here, the stage is heartbeats of light, a shadow play of shifting shapes. A DJ starts and the throb of the music reaches us and we quicken to the pulse, silently and then laughing as we move, feet shuffling in the weeds, fingers tipped toward the sky. The stars swirl. A karoro on the night shift whirls above us, cries out. A tug churns. The rhythmic ding of metal on metal rings out from the port. Ōhinehou makes some noise.

**Tessa Boraston**, *On Not Going to Port Noise*

Camellia stems unfold slowly under observation becoming less and less tabletop flower and more paper sitting somewhere within a layered viewing of many camellias in a garden over time.

At first,

they come from that tree that grows in the driveway that I have never liked, and to which I attach a childhood sense of mistrust when I thought them pretty and picked them but they browned fast, dropped all over the ground decomposing and I decided them ugly or inconvenient.

Then,

they were called camellias, a name I know but didn't know whose name.

And,

we knew they weren't fresh cut stems from the tree outside by the pond. That tree has no flowers on it now anyway.

On viewing, the artist has given us the a key. Undisguised brush strokes on a leaf. See the signifier. See the next clue, continue to see what's there and not make stories from what was in the past, outside, elsewhere. The object observed makes a messy short-cut to memories.

Why – making it what we want – is this the way we see? When at the same time I notice, looking at the lip, the circumference of a ceramic mug, it is so easy to recognise irregular shapes, to identify a straight line or an imperfect circle. A level line too, parallel lines. What does the purpose of identifying a millimetre discrepancy in parallel lines a metre apart from one another have to do with thinking a paper flower is a natural plant?

**Orissa Keane** / Karin Montgomery, *The Camellia Society*, Objectspace, Ōtautahi Christchurch, 2026

Walking into the hall of Ibraaz's permanent home in central London, the walls recall a market of aged fabrics and jute sacks, browned and contrasted with the vibrancy of the chairs that welcome the viewer to sit and talk and contemplate.

The touring exhibition – from Ghanaian artist Ibrahim Mahama – is built from reclaimed railway sleepers and colourful chairs drawn from households across Ghana. Mahama has laid out the chairs in the style of a Westminster parliament. The room reminded us which city we were in and the government form imposed on countries like Ghana and Aotearoa, while being more welcoming and thoughtful. Ibraaz has a goal of being a meeting place for the Global Majority within the heart of the colonial power structure, a tube stop away from the former Colonial Office, which has now adopted the name of the Development Office.

The space calls for imagination. The colours and the textures of the walls – blended into a grade-ii listed building – embody a sense of hospitality. This hospitality is reflective of Ibraaz's goal of holding the urgent conversations that need to be had, keeping the space open for however people wish to use it.

At a time when every institution makes a claim to be refocusing the discussion of art and spaces, Ibraaz feels like a place where it is really happening, where those colonial offices are not just renamed but deconstructed – one Ghanaian railway slab at a time.

**M Grace-Stent / Ibrahim Mahama, *Parliament of Ghosts*, Ibraaz, London, 2025-26**

a scratch

more than memorial

this does more to shroud what's lost

faces and forms over the bodies of buildings, recalling their pulse, forcing our focus not forward but pressing

to earth

...

i ask him to paint my skin.

these hands, so much {like} hers, now hydrangea crowns, with wilted roses at the wrists

colour where there was none, the black strangled by electric blue and greening, echoes

at the spine, scaffold to the sky, i ask to be an unbroken line



...

like we are an unbroken line

i watch my daughter watch him. each stroke of the can an ember, until

we step back

**Sian Alexia / Wongi Wilson at work**

There is only one image.

It hangs above the doorway of Raewyn's cafe on a Saturday morning. Levin is the hometown of Carlos Spencer, and my mate tells me that a lot of good players come from here. With our poweraids sitting on the breakfast table, I glance around the Raewyn's cantina, looking at the pre-made meals for the truck drivers. Families butted generation to generation. I'm here for the exhibition of Hendrix Hennessy-Ropiha.

The shed at the back of 23 Grenville Street billowed with all Hendrix's mates into the muddy yard. His cousin had smashed up a pallet container with the axes, which we feed to the brazier. Hendrix had rented the pad for the week, a somewhat unremarkable single-storied house on the market from another fellow rally enthusiast. Squeaky clean, only Hendrix's large photographs occupied the home.

A joyride around Levin is fairly brief. State Highway One cuts through the township, and most traffic is passing through to Wellington or heading north. Sitting in the back of Hendrix's mate's van, I could be riding around any small New Zealand township with the wide streets and dimly lit cul-de-sacs.

I ask Hendrix if he has described his photographs with the kupu pōuri. I explain that it describes a feeling or state of anguish, the kinda sobering sorrow or emotional whiplash whose appearance could be mistaken for a serene landscape.

**James Tapsell-Kururangi**, Hendrix Hennessy-Ropiha, *We can travel only a short way together*, Taitoko Levin, 2025.

I'm in a gallery by myself. I'm choosing not to wander about in the solipsistic way I usually do. I've come in here with a prefigured purpose: to look at things that are normatively considered non-art. Things like the gallery floor, the ceiling, and the white paint that fills the walls between artworks. In a sense, I'm assessing the gallery spatially, or maybe even architecturally, but I'm also trying to not be overly hermeneutic and rational. I'm doing these things mainly as a form of widening my sensory engagement with the world. I'm trying to sense the selective thresholds of what is interesting and what is habitually ignored in an aesthetic setting. We interpret everything. Even if it's automatic, I consider the world as I move through it: I became attentive of that only recently. I was walking on a concrete path that was struggling to maintain its levelness over a system of erupting roots. I interpreted that uneven ground with the soles of my feet. We live in a forest of signs to be decoded.

**Rahul Hendriksen**, Sensory Input

A few years ago, I was deeply moved by an exhibition honouring the work of Aotearoa artist, experimental filmmaker and poet Joanna Margaret Paul. As I continued to explore her work, particularly her poetry, I was increasingly struck by her courage to express the in/expressible—those moments in life when language fails us. The visceral quality of her work resonates with me; she repositions the feminine body as fluid, lending significance to intertwining the confusing senses. I was especially curious and affected by how she (re)organised the feminine body, one made of memory, expectations and fragility; one which acts as a filter, filled with echoing objects blurring interiority and exteriority.

Below is a poem that responds to Paul's depiction of her experience with feminine labour, highlighting the fusing of physicality with love.

un/concealed

eyes  
voice  
heart  
hand  
fingertips  
nape of neck  
heel of foot  
pit of gut  
ache of muscles  
weight of mind  
loss of words  
repetition of tasks  
vow of care

stumbling befog  
time fragments  
shift spaces  
inherit anguish  
amidst  
glowing  
bliss

shadowy  
margins  
yearn  
the  
now  
yet  
linger  
in  
the past

You said it might be a dealbreaker to be with someone with bad taste. I said I've probably only been with people whose tastes I do not share. And then I tried to describe something I've found captivating recently about visual aesthetics in Thailand using the example of a Buddhist temple or the amalgamation of a number of temples I remember. These places are gaudy as fuck but sometimes incredibly beautiful and in a way that is so contradictory that it has come full circle, the thoughtful and the tacky brush shoulders like clashing colours too close to each other on a colour wheel. One is the gold leaf and red and ornamental and old and reproduced and the saffron robe tradition and cast bells and these and more are sacred. On the other hand is the tin with Mickey Mouse cartoon figures on it which holds the marker pens which are used to write your name and those of loved ones you would like to bring good fortune to onto the saffron robe right there in front of you which is then blessed and tied around the pagoda and this is also sacred and the tin is too. And this was my way to defend or demonstrate my appreciation for the treatment of objects as equal under Thai contradictory standards which I refer to as being democratic in the same sense as Warhol identified CocaCola to be.

**Orissa Keane**, *An attempt to describe a democracy of aesthetic principles by example of a Buddhist temple in Bangkok*

In nature, beings are more likely to thrive if they are able to recognise and honour "abundance by going to meet it when and where it arrives." In *The Serviceberry*, Kimmerer (Potawatomi) reminds us that the current economy has no help for real scarcity – scarcity, as the driving force of capitalist economics, but a fake kind, a manufactured kind designed to produce perpetual consumption. Real and produced scarcity are different beasts. Kimmerer speaks to how unnatural this cycle of excess is. "A world of produce warehouses and grocery stores enables the practice of having what you want when you want it." Abundance is not the same as convenience.

Recognising abundance, meeting and adapting to change are directly linked to people's capacities to encounter difference and imagine new realities. Abundance in the natural world means diversity. In relation to the natural world, Kimmerer puts it bluntly: if what you want is unavailable "want something else". Encountering artworks facilitates not only a tolerance for difference, but a driving curiosity to engage further. Nature, its gift economies, and arts ecologies help to reimagine and shift systems that seek to capitalise on insecurity by manufacturing scarcity. Gift economies build communities that are resilient to actual scarcity.

A gift economy is one where whole ecologies turn towards varied abundances together, understanding that they are not uniform. In late February friends invited a few of us over for dinner with the caveat that we pick some of their tomatoes. Kimmerer writes about how the abundance of nature, a gift in and of itself, begets further gifting. We were arriving with our own shared plates and left with the glowing bounty of their six cherry tomato plants that had provided each couple with their own three kgs. Holding our bagful I calculated that they'd cost me \$45 in supermarkets, and how odd that seemed compared to how right and cheerful picking tomatoes with my friends was.

There's a sensing to the gift economy, a goodness, the joy of seeking it out, of finding or making it. In the arts a gift economy is operating all the time: the volunteer work that makes galleries run; people creating and sharing creations without the expectation it will be immediately and symmetrically reciprocated; the love of the exhibition cycle and the celebratory drinks and nibbles; commemorating the gift of people sharing their creativity with gatherings and eating together. The conversations and the exposure to art practices, ways of being, are

enlivening. Like heliotropes, it's beautiful to watch people turning towards the arts in their communities and the communities made through art.

The Serviceberry nourishes. I plucked phrases like tomatoes, putting them in my basket and marvelling at the enoughness and the provision, feeling cared for. The biggest tomato I am taking with me is Kimmerer's compassion and how it makes hard truths more bearable and wholesome ones sweeter.

**Meg Doughty** / Robin Wall Kimmerer, *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*, 2024.

sometimes at the bottom of a very very deep hole you have dug you will find yourself face upturned to the sky covered in dirt taking a breath for the first time since you were buried under and like a drain after the washing of the dishes from your latest meal this hole might get clogged and as some things don't drain, some holes aren't big enough to let things into, so you might find the top of this now lidless hole isn't possible to ascend back out of, so you're the gristle in the teeth, you're the memory of swallowing, and what was it that Mario Savio said again...?

**Josiah Morgan**

There is a tough part about it. The remembering. And the fatigue I feel already in my hand, where you have to write from the head and the heart, the head already on a lean against the other hand. But she is right—I do feel more creative. The head on a lean and the writing – handwriting – follows suit. It's hard to concentrate with the sound of the pen on the paper, it's an inky tap-scrape. Gummy even. And I get distracted by the way the letters look, the way I made them look, and by looking out the window and swinging my leg.

I want to describe an experience but I'm already afraid. I'm afraid that a particular person will read it. Even the mention of it is too exposing and I can't look at the imagination. I thought to use the words of Gertrude Stein, so as not to put it into my own words, something to hide behind like a very thin tree, so long as it is wide enough to cover both of my eyes simultaneously.

I have never been as proud of anything as I am of snow on the mountain opposite. 20 If they had been able they would have gone to see it. 17

What is the difference between sentiment and romance. 16

It was when he did behaviour as a blessing. 21



Sentiment is awhile and weighed as a weight and romance is made to be authentic. 16

Scenery is a valley in moonlight. 16

There is no use in finding out what is in anybody's mind. 16

One thoroughly two thoroughly three thoroughly. 21

One is generally told that they mean me. 21

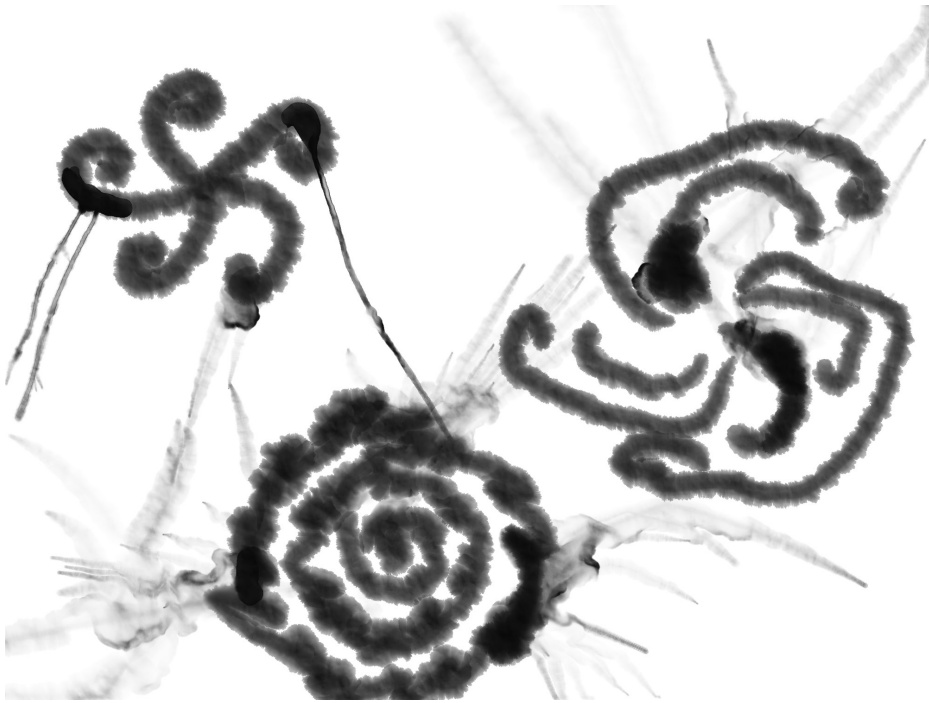
I would very much like to stay longer in the country. 17

It is a pleasure to play with a dog. 31 This is true. It is even a pleasure to watch someone play with a dog. Or watch a dog play with a river. Or a rock. Or a stick. Or a ball. Or watch a stick in a river. Or a rock at the bottom of a river. Or a rock coming out of the river and to imagine an eel under the rock. Or stand on a rock that is under a river and feel an eel come out from under the rock and swim around where you stand and most likely go back under the rock but you're not so sure now so you're back on the shore.

There is a house near where there is a bridge. 10 This is also true. And at night it is easy to see the house and harder to see the bridge so you have to trust it's there and keep walking. And in the day time both are easy to see which makes it less exciting.

**Millie Dunstall** / Gertrude Stein, *How to Write*, 1931

christians  
the best  
of the world



**Sorawit Songsataya** / Alex Monteith, *Cherishing the sea forests*, Thailand Biennale, 2026

The evening the cyclone hit there was nothing to do but sit and wait. I had recently been given Joanna Margaret Paul: *Imagined in the Context of a Room* and, alone and slightly on edge, her paintings and words became my companions during that long evening waiting out the storm.

I sat folded in the old armchair by my door, Joanna in my lap. It is rare, I think, to have a whole evening with nothing to do but read. This is the kind of weather that halts everything.

The collection of essays in Joanna builds a picture of a life that is domestic, and also (or, arguably, therefore) transcendent. This is what happens when 'the interior' – that murky and endlessly curious place within – is realised. Contemplation begins. Paul is occupied with considering interior life, exploring the boundaries of the garden, the home, a vessel, a body. The dishrack of cups and utensils, or the breakfast table of jammy eggs and coffee cups, become sites of intersection, where the personal intimacy of the captured moment is recognisable to the collective, and what is sacred and what is profane blurs.

These domestic scenes, that dominate across all the mediums – painting, poetry, film, photography – Paul worked in, locate us within the routines and labours of home-life, and move us into the private world of the artist. Was she rushing to stack the soapy dishes before getting the children to bed, or did she linger to notice the evening sunlight brighten the yellow of the jug, and if so, what did that moment of stillness mean to her? What did it tell her of surrender? Of pleasure? Of God? Paul is interested in the betweenness of things, meaning a riot of colours and textures might be surrounded by blank page, or cascading lines of poetry interact with the white spaces in between. What is just out of the frame is just as important as what is in it.

It is near midnight when I close Joanna. I'm listening to the violence of wind and rain outside, feeling my small frame of a body curled in its chair, protected from the storm by thin walls. When I wake, I will see the news of a landslide on Mauao, the maunga I grew up beside, and I will, like everyone, feel the vulnerability of how closely the mundane borders catastrophe.

But the subject of the mundane in Paul's work, be it the dishes, the messy table, the living room, the view of the street, is always embraced, precisely because of this bordering (something that Paul must have known intimately via the death of her nine-month-old daughter Imogen). Nothing is reduced or boring. Aliveness emerges precisely from the awareness of a preciousness, a rigorous attending to the dynamism possible in each moment, in every object.

stillness is  
eternity

late  
into the night  
I sit  
quietly

the hum of rain  
and thoughts

like a

doorway

my body, a threshold  
conduit  
of / between  
stillness

and motion

this  
quiet figure

the paradox of still life

the tea  
brewed

the heart  
calamitous

**Millie Godfery** / Joanna Margaret Paul, *Imagined in the Context of a Room*, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 2021.

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