

I am enamoured with women – their instinct for survival and access to joy. Poet Grace Yee writes about a state of security co-created by Chinese women, and through these descriptions I glimpse a commonality in our ancestry. Not through genealogy, but through migration; the challenges of the English (language); cultural disconnection, acculturation and a return to one's roots. I appreciate the acknowledgement of strength in Yee's line, "fridays are plain rice and oyster sauce with mother. she has the jaw of a warrior, the eyes of a myocardial infarction, and parotid glands incapable of salivating english sentences." Western colonial perspectives villainise women; synonymising us with a lack of prestige. Narratives of hysteria, (dis)obedience and weakness relentlessly encircle our day-to-day (double it for women of colour and trans women). Yet, it is women who create and shape my being, like the moana polishing a tuatua shell.

The women in my family have a paradoxical presence. Memories, although they seldom feature, tend to be the times they are doing the most for me, our family and our community. Our mundane and simple experiences are the most significant moments of my life so far. This is resonant in Yee's line, "she grew bean sprouts on the verges of sweeping changes." I remember sitting in my great-grandmother's lap while she sung itsy-bitsy-spider and traced the story onto my back. I remember my sister and I leaping into bed knowing Nana would tuck us in tight and read a story from her Ladybird book collection. I remember my mother, working her arse off for a boss who undervalued her; my older cousin Taylor supervising our playground visits and the way Nana Walker held me tighter as we got older. This sentiment extends to women I have not met; the many wāhine Māori who carried themselves and their whānau through colonial violence. An unfathomable effort to help us survive the denial of rongoā, te reo Māori and the right to exist within te ao Māori. We are linked. We are the winter's black mittens, the quiet hours under the gum tree; the orchard to seek shelter within.

Paige Walker / Grace Yee, 'seek shelter, orchards' in *Joss: A History* (2025)

more than the crushed gold-veined surface; fluoro shapes and textured kiss-like rounds, my mind goes to the making {shadow worker} their hands doing the labour, eyes sweet with new tears and spilling {blood moon} their daughter just to my right sitting under {Sam's Creek} and taking notes, or dreaming, or whatever she does on the world of the page in the worlds of her mind; the daughter, the making {I lava you} more than the high industrial ceiling and buyers cradling wine in glasses and price sheets {performer} I see her studio, her home, its pulsing walls waiting for creation, and her {starduster} shedding skin and shedding dust which was also her dust and hers before her {gone burger} she's not only shedding but making, as we can all only shed and make {shore thing} as we can only be an angel passing by on a crowded street full of bodies and sound, and, more than her titles I see her eyes, the lines beside, the depth {honey trapper} that goes down, is the plumbline, to become remains where becoming, remains.

Sian Alexia / Miranda Parkes, *Rewilder*, Jonathan Smart Gallery, Ōtautahi Christchurch, March 2026

Welcome to the calentón.

Sunday, February 8th 2026. Or Monday, February 9th, if you are in Aotearoa New Zealand.

El espectáculo de medio tiempo del Súper Sazón, Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio.

The most expensive ad airtime in the world. A celebration of sport. American culture. Not as in arts and culture, though. But then came Benito. Performing the most-watched half-time performance in Super Bowl history. Peak viewership: 137.8 million worldwide. These numbers will vary depending on the source. Like most important details when it comes to history.

Bad Bunny performed live in front of a mostly white audience, during one of the worst times to be Latino in the United States. His only concert there was a statement. You can go online and search for all the references to Latino culture. For those of us in the diaspora, we noticed every single one of them, and we cried. We felt seen. Treasured. Loved. Cared for. During those precious 13 minutes, many in the Latino community had a respite from ICE raids, injustice and prejudice.

And because of that, Benito gave me the courage to come back to a medium that always felt safe and intimate. One that I felt well-versed in my native language, Portuguese. One that helped me process so much of the world around me. One that gave depth and meaning, and helped paint the landscape of my feelings and my place in the world... and then there was English. With a completely different grammatical structure of meaning, and bias.

Portuguese is poetic, deep, full of aphorisms, colour, and space to expand thoughts and feelings. English felt cold and judgmental. Not the language itself, because I won't shoot the messenger anymore. It was the gaze. The readers. The privileged position of shutting down someone's opinion without having any lived experiences or vast knowledge on a topic. Or at least curiosity.

Representation is an important, powerful, and understandably feared tool: it reminds us of our voice. Our heritage. The oceans crossed. The ancestors who paved the way and paid the price for us to be here today. To have the privilege of disrupting the status quo. To inconvenience a system built to silence us, and make us feel small and powerless.

I'm coming back to my(self) writing practice because of and inspired by Benito: if he is brave enough to dedicate his career as a cultural statement, I need to be braver in how I show up in the world. How lucky to be born with sazón. It'd be a waste of spice otherwise.

Cue violins playing with a sugarcane plantation as a background. Ass shaking. Baddies. Big hoops energy. A performance beautifully curated and researched. Delivering so much more than entertainment. I WILL take more photos. I am Latina. I am loud. And I will forever be proud.



Baila baila baila sin miedo, ama sin miedo
Seguimo aqui
Ainda estou aqui

Jade Cavalcante / El espectáculo de medio tiempo del Súper
Sazón by Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, Levi's Stadium in
Santa Clara, California, USA, February 2026

Writing a curator bio is just like writing an artist bio – it changes all the time. I try to write an updated version each time it's needed. After the most recent institutional position that guaranteed me the identity as a curator, I'm now trying my best on the beginner level of juggling-many-things-all-at-once freelancing life. I get to spend a lot of time thinking, what even is curating? If not a position, does (how does) curating exist? Because of this, the most recent iteration of my relationship to curating is feeling-based and hyper-personal.

Being a freelancer, curating comes in an expansive form; one organises and relates to art by creating the conditions for oneself. Essentially a creative practice, I'd like to think the potential of curating comes from an embodied need to action. An urge? The word curating feels like a metonymy of many things, the constant assemble and shun of mediums that evolves into a work of its own right. This also reflects curating as a practice that works through time.

// a longing for poetry in curatorial work

// is for all the deleted paragraphs because I felt insecure
// is for all the potential of feelings before it became formally analysed

One clear struggle at the centre of curatorial work here in Aotearoa is funding. The systemic limits, where discussions often go to the discouraging money hellholes, predefine how curatorial effort can be effective.

// What is the curatorial history in Aotearoa?
// We can't only speak to this colonial logic of curation

The birth of curating inherits colonial logic, and with it, colonial blind spots. That cognitive, epistemological, metaphysical reinforcement on the Eurocentric tree! The reinforcement that turns our efforts at solidarity into a scourge. Everyone's knowledge is anchored differently, each of our positions has been shadowed by the empire in its own way. The problem is how we can unclog new intellectual, corporeal, emotional, relational inheritances for our thinking and acting, for curating. That specific taxonomy of how curators work is not what I inherited, but learnt.

// What if the most radical practice of curating is not to be a curator?

// What is the question I am asking through curating?

// I curate because I want to practise the practice. I write because I want to write.

On the second day of the Maria Lind workshop hosted by Puku and Artspace Aotearoa in Tāmaki, we shared our homework: if we can bring a piece of artwork and locate it somewhere near the Parnell train station (where the workshop happened), what would the work be and where would it be? And if it's the artwork leading the act of locating, how would we consider it differently? For me, this poses an important perspective reflecting on where and what the inspiration of curating comes from. In this instance, it is in recognising the agency of the work, and the shared affective field between artwork, curator and site.

// I want to seek the possibilities curating can bring.

Interdependent, interrelated. I want to feel a sense of openness when talking about what I do. Not to romanticise it, but to practise the practice of negotiating in relations. To cherish the sensitivity, to accumulate intuition (borrowed from Suzy Park), to own up to the feelings, to walk with (borrowed from WCSCD).

Jingcheng Zhao, If I rename 'curating', I call it poetry

I remember when I clocked the arrival of Lime scooters into the city. I was walking on Tasman Street at night. It was prematurely turning to summer, mild. I noticed the magnolias had bloomed earlier than the year before, wide open gullets to August rain. I was expecting to hear cicadas because of the unseasonable temperature but instead there was the synthetic croak of several e-scooters knocked over on the footpath. I felt sad and had a heightened awareness that the aural landscape was changed forever.

At the time, I was writing about Sorawit Songsataya's exhibition *Offspring of Rain* with Antonia Barnett-McIntosh at Enjoy which developed from research into the Mākara West Wind Farm. The wind farm used to be a radio station, a history which I read as a way to reconnect with the acoustic experience of weather, and elemental envelopment as a communal sensation. I was trying to understand the relationship between the environment, sound, and togetherness, and how to resist alienating these entities from each other. The two events – Lime scooters and the exhibition – are connected in my mind because Sorawit's work had made me start to listen in a different way.



There are many other times in history where the noises that compose our sonic intake transformed. Imagine hearing a car rushing down the street for the first time or a plane flying overhead. The ring of a telephone. The absence of sound as species are extinguished and objects become obsolete. The telephone ringing is now a cellphone. My grandad was born in 1926 and he is still alive, in a world that sounds totally different to Louisburgh, County Mayo, a hundred years ago.

The introduction of these co-sharing scooter fleets added a layer of sound to the world that was swiftly naturalised as a possible sonic experience of the twenty-first century. It joins an inventory of machines, birdsong, human voice, bells, reeds, water, construction. Lime is only one example of a company who pays to park their share vehicles in public spaces. The imperative “pay attention” might now be understood as a reminder that the appearance of new and noisy products trades on the knowledge that listening is a worthy currency, and if you have enough money, you can buy someone’s earspace.

Lime is based in San Francisco; it is a unicorn company that enjoyed primary investment from Andreessen Horowitz, super angel investors with a technology-based portfolio. Unicorns, super angels: miracles appropriated by the mystic realm’s true opposite. Andreessen Horowitz is one of the most dominant VCs in Silicon Valley and funds AI, Elon Musk, space initiatives, weapons development and MAGA Inc.

The gradual erosion of the sonic environment as a common zone corresponds with the otherwise-silence of the contemporary world. The bus is so quiet. Sometimes I put my headphones in and don’t press play on anything. Everyone else has their headphones in as well. It is a rejection of possible conversation or interaction with the world, and specifically the people, around us. Instead, the world happens inside a phone, with a talking head and a computer-generated voiceover and misspelled closed captions accelerating across the glass surface. Daily activities have been optimised to reduce friction; that is, the need for human interaction in carrying out a task.

Joanna Pocock wrote about this automation in her recently published memoir *Greyhound*, an account of two separate trips across the United States taken seventeen years apart. The most striking difference registered between the two journeys was the disappearance of basic facilities like ticketing booths, taxi stands, transport depots and reception desks. They had all been replaced by apps that had no corresponding presence in the physical world and no human point of contact if anything went wrong: if a bus failed to show up, if someone was a dollar short of a fare, if you hadn’t correctly populated the required fields of information. At the core of Pocock’s text was a recognition that the technological basis of these new systems made the process of travelling from one place to another very difficult for anyone whose life didn’t include a stable address, a credit card or a

smartphone. In other words, the dematerialisation of basic infrastructure was a class issue.

The question of who has autonomy to participate in contemporary life is sharply inflected when thinking about sound. In Henrike Kohpeiss’ book *Bourgeois Coldness*, she analyses Odysseus’s passage past the Island of the Sirens. Odysseus, the hero, directed his crew to tie him to the mast of the ship as they sailed by so he could hear their entrancing song from the safe restraints of his binds. The crew were instructed to plug their ears with wax so they could not hear the sirens and avoid the temptation of their tune. Kohpeiss describes this arrangement as the foundational class division inherent to aesthetic experience. These “differently distributed possibilities of sensorially participating in the world” are at the forefront of my meditation on listening in the present.

Jane Wallace / Listening I

We went to the same high school
An earthquake and a rebuilding built city between us, but still,
It was the same school

I remember watching you paint that mural
The one with all the NZ icons
Like our own Mount Rushmore
But instead of stealing land
They
Shifted
Our
Perception

Changed what we thought was possible
Like LSD
I had an inkling you were influenced
It was obvious to my soft, teenage brain,
really

Maybe not so much to Mr Wilson

Probably coz I was already on that by 15
I thought maybe you too
And maybe Hillary dabbled (Sir, Ed)

I mean, he got high in a different way, but there have been theories

YIKES!

Seeing this new series of works, something solidifies about you
You don't stray from your style and path
Like the kid who hogs the Xbox controller
You just end up letting him coz he's so confident navigating the game

The only non-figurative works on the walls of an exhibition about the body
The arrangements stretch and knot across the surfaces – tubiform, viscous, and
occasionally blooming small patches of vibrancy
Perhaps a phallic form comes to mind
The swirling forms feel more representative of mind than the physical bodies on the
surrounding walls

I don't actually know if I enjoy these works or if they just stand out the most,
both for your status in our intimate canon and for their stylistic distance from the
neighbouring pieces

Individual and unbothered
Whether liked or not.

Max Lowe / Jacob Yikes' work in *Everybody*, 192 Saint Asaph St, for Ōtautahi
Christchurch Pride, March 2026

I feel a great deal more nervous *than I should given that I've grown now out and away from this place.* I feel a great deal *as I always have this has not changed this will not change.* There are a few more happenstances *than when I was here last in this unchanging plain things are starting to vibrate and rub against one another.* There is a frequency that is shifting I see it has taken you I ask myself if it is me who will bring you back. Under what condition can this be a success?
Where to put your mind to *when your mind cannot be trusted.* Many conflicting ideas that decided to marry. *I choose to show An overt interest I believed there was An undeniable draw. I am willing To put my heart in jeopardy To get it over the line.*
You may leave me with A deep cut with a throb. You may leave me with A deep cut with a pulse. I may soar on A generous arc. I may abandon this hounding feeling I may



abandon this howling feeling Let go of the hankering. I leave this town Not wide eyed nor weary. I leave this town in A blanket of peace. I leave you Hollowed and shamed; Curse this Serpentine mind. To imagine love is to imagine A generous pour and A lustre. I'm imagining snow.

Met with An alien sensation that is not To be restricted. In my belly I feel A deep contortion when I look at you Gigantic and able bodied. This night will prevent A sagging heart and Heavy timber bones will weigh A great deal less. It is sure to happen Lest we forget the way Lest we neglect our surrounds. We must keep A channelled eye A steeled mind. Before you let me Gently down again Look at me with A balanced eye take me in with complete digestion this moment Not long hoped for I will leave this gorge Wild and willowed. Surely delivered By a steady hand washing up on A chilled embankment. The angels will reach down in A deep lunge I will be Beckoned upon Danced around my fate Not yet decided With room to expand I smile up with a chipped tooth. Still in my body A spot to be danced upon Worthy of capturing my face and body A downy surface I turn cheek with A cropped ear. Headed nowhere Spiralling outwards Concealed and therefore deprived. Forever lusting so hell bent over A generic look hell bent over for a generic look With deep emotion. Biting down on A suppressed smirk flaunt your Lousy recognition. Satellite beacon. Generations ago and now still Forthcoming despite an obvious tightness

Express yourself With lasting effect. With lasting resonance An oily bell tolls one over In silken robes I walk to your pillar A generic muse wades through my mind Without great catastrophe I can picture it clearly. Near and beckoning With rusted petals Gouging deep troughs my hallmark of greatness there is nothing I haven't Downplayed often. A misstep in cadence results in A short fall Bound to be broken on heel of palms. Docked and trolleyed Carted beyond sight. Unexpected effervescence A deep resonance like I've known you a long time Long and steady your gaze holds me above all else Short and sure I close the gap.

Giant bellies and anchored breasts we were playful from the start Curved toes with wide angles there is nothing I won't tell you. I take issue with an odour I don't want you interrupted A sensation I'd liken to meeting your maker. Deep gusts through cut valleys this body has taken its claim the taniwha moves as he pleases scoring earth in his wake. A toothache place Is that an expression? Not fully ignited with a dim hearts flame catching the edge of A wistful glimmer turns in stride to A hopeful fantasy cut down on A sharp expression we will take an early pivot. After you treat that neglected sore and dank energy A surprised memory A realisation surfaces Carefully spoken. A memory taken in delicate hands Propped up by joy Acrid and boneless Beached and unholy. A sacred inclination that holds my destiny An indication of insanity An indication of disparity. Wholly sacrilege you throw it back at me. An epic journey that wasn't highly rated A score to be kept since I won't forget Feelings of mutiny you prepare to turn on me. Wholly revolt I leave you with these feelings. Bash against the sides. Shipwreck the feelings with desperate abandon hoping they stay there on those unfriendly rocks harnessed harpooned dug deep into the ribs and holding firm. Renounce all feeling Apart from a sure course Apart from a sure cause Define what is new. Partly felt and wholly left Four wrong turns led us here all that is left is A simple negotiation.

Millie Dunstall, Grief is my angel's spear

"In the unlikely event..."

Whenever an airline attendant speaks this phrase, it ties my gut up in knots with suppressed apprehensions, anxieties and fears.

It is the reason I do not watch horror films or reality TV. I turn my head and shut my eyes tight when danger strikes. And most of all, I shield my ears, for it is the sound that forces its way into my body, to squat as

unwanted reminders of pain, doom, loss and trauma. I can carry on in a composed manner with afterimages, but sound is a barbed virus with the capacity to pull me towards the black dog. A siren, knife blades slashing the air, window glass breaking, tires screeching, yelling, screaming, valleys flooding, hillsides sliding, bombs dropping.

My first memory of this response (far too gentle a word for the affliction) was when a small plane crashed down the street from our house in Long Beach, California. I was four years old and only just allowed to walk to preschool. I remember hearing calls, whimpers, moans and smelling something burning well before turning the corner to see clothes, limbs, seats, metal parts caught in a tree. Everything was singed black, even the tree and the ground below it. I need not describe further.

It's a wonder that I bought tickets to experience Darkfield's immersive installation Flight. Perhaps I did not bother to read the blurb accompanying the trailer video. Perhaps the blind trust in a friend's recommendation was enough. Perhaps I was long overdue for an existential crisis, something that would rattle the doldrums of winter's loneliness and ignite my dulled senses. I remain perplexed at the boldness, bravery or even self-harm that this folly provoked.

I don't need to blur reality and imagination. They are often one and the same. Imagination is a haunting that seems to infiltrate reality's mundane and profane predictable patterns, promising to disrupt its sameness in small irritation or cataclysmic manner. Living life in this way confirms my mother's well-meaning comforting clichés: "Come here now, let me give you a hug. You wear your heart on your sleeve and your soul is too porous." Never was her advice about how to return my heart to my chest or plug up the leaking holes to my interior self. A bloody sponge.

Being ultra-sensitive to sound is an attribute I value. But like a reversible jacket, it can easily weigh me down. As if I have swallowed a boulder. I don't think this sensorial characteristic is special; it's a late-in-life self-realisation. If forced to, I would lose my sight over going deaf. So entering a nearly pitch-black container fitted out to mimic half of a plane interior did not phase me. I confess to the thrill of putting the noise-cancelling headphones on. My friend sitting next to me vaporised and the world became void except for a faint technological crackle and hum, gremlins in the air waves. It was the same utter solitariness I experienced in the Victoria University anechoic chamber, the same independence of walking alone deep into the heat of the New Mexico desert, and the same agonising blur of 'not quite true' when my partner left this world. It was shapeshifting.

Yes, indeed, I was one of those passengers that clenched the chair arms when the plane was headed to crash, soothed by the nostalgic glitchy screen footage and bemused at the effects of binaural mastering that

tricked my body to feel the whispers in my right ear, then over my shoulder then in my face. Intellectually I knew it was a show, a dramatisation, a sensory storytelling. And yet, the rest of me was completely duped. It lured me into its clutches. Played games with my morals. Brewed havoc with my complacency to live or die. Perhaps Sartre's novel Nausea isn't fiction after all? I craved more than the twenty-two minutes afforded but also desperately wanted to pull back the curtain, like in The Wizard of Oz, to illuminate the all-too-convincing trickery.

Aero-neurosis, masochism or aviophobia? Many have surmised it as fear of flying, an archetypal modern phobia that preys on our discomforts concerning technology, the pace and stress of contemporary life, and giving up control to invisible forces. For how does a 500-tonne aircraft defy gravity when it launches itself into the air, an unnatural feat? Or is Sigmund Freud's theory of flying as a sign of anxiety about sexuality and sexual intimacy literally in practice?

To say the least, the flight of Flight bore out my vulnerabilities. It asked me to yield my rational senses to the possibility of alternative worlds, worlds in which physics, gravity, the sureness of ground and the promise of companionship were thwarted, or at best, doubted. It was a shaky ride, an invigorating, upsetting, unsettling affirmation of being human. A morsel of that experience remains floating around in my inner pleural cavity. My sound life is more guarded now knowing how susceptible I am to such sound-worlds.

That night I drove home in the bleating rain and ghostly darkness of Transmission Gully and the inane chatter of national talk radio. As my vehicle flung itself at 110 kmph into the fog through Wainui Saddle, news of the hour filled the interior volume of another technological wonder. I was a captive listener. The stories of the day, of this world, it told were as vivid, visceral, horrifying and heart-wrenching, maybe even more so, than Flight. Perhaps in the unlikely event, life is stranger than fiction.

Julieanna Preston / Darkfield, Flight, Odins Plaza, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington, July 2025

The moat agape. Already it is dusk. Städelites in peril. Tenement purlieus of the Frankfurt underworld. Deprived of gleaming elevator. Necrotic in texture. Envious Caligari. Black and green and mould. Ominous gate. Snakes for doorhandles. Decrepit brickwork. Dickensian courtyard. Reclamation of lost earthquakes. Many flights of echoing and stained Formica stairs. Baby poo painted walls. The magic mountain. The scene is set for recovery. A cure for wellness. Meet the Feebles.

“I’ve had piercing thoughts to do with gulls recently.” Shells from Otama beach. The harsh interrogations of a British tourist: too many scallop fragments. “I grind them up to make eyeshadow.” Flee on foot. Red ochre. Waimata stream. The Anxiety of Influence. The Influence of Anxiety. There is no depression in Germany. Cronenberg says that art is not therapeutic. But it can be. Noh drama. Unhappy faces. Masking. “Externalising my own discomfort.” Movement, chanting, repetition. A report on breathing.

A particularly strange and deeply unsettling encounter in Frankfurt. Redacted Tomi National Park. Why blankets? A quest for comfort in a land of little. A New Career in a New Town. An old lady in a small New Zealand town. Trademeification. Crude visions of malignant narcissism. Hospital corridor realisation. Secrets to be undeciphered. “Like General Haig I am trapped in a repetitive cycle.” Tracey stitching furiously. The toxic places destroy clarity. Topology of a phantom city. Barney modelling in Algeria. Applying honey. The tears of night find their dank dwelling. Sleep has his house.

Early March. Glissading into treacherous valleys. Confrontation with imminent night. Administrative ensnarement. Simon Denny stomping on the ground. Foul dreams of an unsane Georgian. Lashed from my slumbers by brutal fixer, motocross enthusiast, bureau-wizard. Wrecker of civilisation. Silver shank, nice mount. Engagement ring. “The thing sparkled quite a lot.” Beads of Guangdong. Diseased diamond mind. A distinctly unromantic gesture. Poison dwarf of the symbolic disorder. Discourse, figure. Volcaniclastic purging. An auxiliary figuration emerging. Pearly whites lining a Sasquatch portrait encasing a cracked double portrait. Gilded doubles. Guilt mirrors.

Gaudy Gaudi rummaging around Bacon’s golden jaw. Scrape your teeth clean. The alliserops, Flying Paralejurus, Crotacephalina and Reedops are becoming restless in their nocturnal nirvana. Locating provisions in a cave. Hierarchy of grottos. Embrace of the serpent. Donald Duck in a K-hole. Immobilised and terrified. Crosseyed and painless. Red line through a stucco sky. Musical miniatures. Sonic still life. Trumpet playing skeleton. Vigil on Mars. Crawling up the Hairway to Steven.

A scummy bed of one’s own. Books and bastards. Scary monsters (and super creeps). Twombly on trap kit. Volcanic shards of Stromboli. Caramel swirl. Flesh, water, fire, air, earth, heart. Cronenberg also dreamed of a beauty contest for the inside of the human body. This prophecy is half-realised by sewing organs onto the exterior of the artist’s torso. Heart on sleeve. An alchemy of shredded nerves. An embroidery of mysticism. If Borges was a sculptor of human tissue. High altar. Atmospheric ascension. Chamber music. Girls just wanna have fun. A Silvina Ocampo generated tulpa cradling and reassuring someone in a state of profound distress. Charred, screaming stones against a pleasant, Mediterranean backcloth. Mongrel smoke signals. Oxymoronic oxidation. A turquoise glockenspiel trundled into hell.

Nick Harte / Henry Turner, *The Fear, the Guilt, & the Pain*, Ivan Anthony, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, March 2026

Tomorrow it will rain.

Where I cross Brougham Street after Simeon to get into town has been under construction possibly since I got back end of last year, I don’t remember. Last week was the first time I noticed that there’s a picture of the overpass bridge they are working on along with a timeline.

The generated image of the overpass is dramatic and depicted at a scale that’s hard to make sense of. There are no overpasses in the city just meant for bikes and

pedestrians. This one, the idea of this one in the future, reminds me of a footbridge I'm fond of in Bangkok that crosses a busy multilane road next to Lumpini Park. Standing in the middle of the bridge above the hot traffic and noise I would watch the progress on the demolition of one of my grandfather's buildings, one of the buildings he designed. I returned periodically to that spot over the course of six months as the scaffold went up and then the screens which covered it from view. And then the structure got shorter and shorter until it was no longer visible even from such a vantage point.

I'm looking forward to having a new view of the city, and this one should be quite good because it will have to be high enough for trucks to pass under. Because it's a cycleway, the track that leads up to it will have to loop a big loop so that the gradient isn't too steep. This is what's making the picture of it look so strange, actually.

In a conversation with friends over dinner, we were at Joyful for Henry's birthday, we discussed a fear of flying. Apparently the seat 11A is the safest one on any airliner. I voiced that I don't fear flying but I often will have a moment when sitting in my seat before take-off when I think, well, if anything happens there'll be nothing I can do about it. Saying this out loud I realised that this feeling of resignation which comes with my own helplessness in the face of death is similar to and potentially stems from a thought I commonly have while cycling where I am regularly re-accepting the very real possibility that I might die. This doesn't usually take up too much time but the habit is enough that I recognise now that it is a reflex to thoughts of my death.

There's a popular story in my family of when we were about to emigrate here to Aotearoa and daddy, maybe we were still in Cardiff then, was on the phone to someone from New Zealand Immigration and she asked him about his ear fears. As you can imagine, he was taken aback but responded that he didn't have any fears, that he wasn't scared. She repeated herself trying to relay her meaning and eventually daddy realised what she was asking about.

After the intersection of the future overpass I turned around on the empty street to inspect some yellow I saw on the grass below an overhanging lemon tree. They were leaves. The owner of the lemon tree was in the driveway and since I had conspicuously cycled right by their house I continued on and turned down a side street instead of going along my usual path home which would have involved them witnessing my passing their house for a third time.

It was a street I had never been down before and it led to a new yet familiar route of small residential elbow streets that come out onto main roads in my neighbourhood. I thought about autopilot and how sometimes I stay so far inside my own head when I'm biking that I come to and wonder if it's safe, yet I know my eyes are still alert to the road and the new things. Then I wondered about how new memories forming slows down your day, I mean that

when you do the same thing every day the days might go faster because your brain isn't working on making lots of new memories. And I've been working for the last six weeks at CAG and the days are beginning to feel like they go a lot faster even though nothing has really changed to speed them up.

At work yesterday Nick told me that only the very centre of our vision is in colour and that our brains colour in the rest, piecing together data gathered from our constantly flitting eyes. He said, if you focus on a single spot for long enough without moving your eyes, resisting the urge to dart as they want to, then after 20 minutes or so, reality falls away and you get a sense of what raw data your eyes are actually telling you. He said, the centre might still be in focus but everything else melts into a monochromatic mess around that point as the brain will make up for a lack of visual stimuli. Literal tunnel vision, he said.

Taking this different way home, my eyes found the birch and oak trees because these days I know how to identify edible mushrooms, since you taught me. When I was young my friend Rachael and I used to sit in her little garden on Harman Street chatting and listening to music and picking what we called mutant clovers. They were mostly four-leaf but we called them mutants because some had five or seven leaves. Since then, I glance down sometimes while walking and spot a four-leaf clover which can be an impressive party trick in the right moment.

Mushroom-eyes, clover-eyes, red-apple-eyes, yellow-lemon-eyes, roadside-score-eyes. We sat on the bed where the light was best, cheek to cheek, with the mirror from my bathroom reflecting our faces so we could compare our irises.

I worried to you in a silly way in a text message that my brain was atrophying because I was working and not forming new memories and you said, it's okay the brain doesn't have to work all the time and it leaves plenty of grey matter for forming memories where it matters heart heart heart heart heart.

In the night, I've often also been at work in the gallery, in my sleep I mean, I'm dreaming, looking for mushrooms at the base of white-painted walls and green museum display cases.

Orissa Keane, *Commuting in autumn*



These objects were made to be used

They never expected to be locked in time

Preserving the memory of their departed user

Nothing moves

Please don't touch

Accustomed to handling

and regular human presence

they entered a deep hibernation

They no longer speak to each other

or sing

as they used to

Were they aware that their user was a famous writer?

Or do they just remember a tender pair of hands

Now people only pass through on guided tours

Gliding through like ghosts

Who respectfully removed their shoes

Before entering

Keeping their hands to themselves

While the house remains asleep

We whisper so as not to wake it

The floorboards creak underfoot

As if relieved for the contact

And to break the silence

New objects enter the house. They are vibrant with the energy of intention, creation, handling, touch. They find homes amongst those that have lain dormant for so long they have cast permanent shadows on the wall, the table, the bench, the shelf. The singular memory of the house is interrupted with new stories, awakening those who had long since told all the stories they had to tell. The new and the old sing together, their songs from different worlds but nonetheless finding a certain harmony. New materials, new textures, new hands, new sensibilities tell of a changed world.

But some things stayed the same

The objects sing to each other and tell stories

As they always have

...

I watched Jen tie cast bronze stems of lavender into a cord of black velvet. Silently, deftly. Absorbed in the task of performance, she inhabited a different plane to our own: the observers to a seemingly private experience. Her actions spoke of an internal logic that wasn't ours to know, echoing the intimate quality of the entire house that was once a private abode. We respectfully removed our shoes before entering, tread softly, and spoke in hushed voices, as though we were in a holy place removed from the noise and speed of the mundane. We, the audience, became silent ghosts; the objects and their maker the active subjects of energy and experience. She arranged the clinking cord of stems into place in the parlour curtains, the drying frame in the kitchen ceiling, the bathroom, then broke the spell announcing the performance was over. We put our shoes back on and descended into the garden to return to our bodies.

Steven Junil Park / Jen Alexandra, *Tie Eight, Winds of Fate – an art gesture*, Ngaio Marsh House, Ōtautahi Christchurch, March 2026

Lisa Walker's jewellery is inexplicable. She's trained as a goldsmith but she doesn't turn out rings. Brooches, bangles and necklaces seem to be her bread and butter. Not that you'd recognise them as such. She is more of a junk assembler than a jeweller and yet, like her "stone, bone and shell" brethren everything is deliberately made to be worn. To swing with the wearer. Indeed there's such intent behind the layering up of the objects, that whilst she may fall into the bricoleur category that cliché of resourcefulness seems beside the point. Sure, like Judy Darragh, Walker shares a penchant for the discarded, for the kitsch. Both cultivate an irreverent materiality. Both mime a certain discernment as cultural capital but in Walker's hands this capitulation to excess is less upcycling than it is a pointed use of the cultural remnant as vector. Not to mention that these days she tends to hand-make her materials – stitch-work and painting seems to have replaced glue gun and shopping! Nevertheless, assemblage still seems to be the rubric through which to read Walker's work. She's still obsessed with culture's materiality, taking what she needs at will, and her jewellery, even when it's hand-made, is still as inexplicable as ever. And yet running through

it is this latent thread, a tropological turn that imbricates us.

Take an earlier work of Walker's from 2017 in which she paints six human hands upon a yellow board that is in turn designed to hang around the neck. Each of the hands are diagrammatic. They pose a kind of turning or weaving. The symbols suggest the hands twist, or they turn. They're about to begin. Together the board orchestrates. It functions instrumentally. We can twist something, weave something. It all begins from this turning, this twisting. It is an object lesson in miniature. The twist turns. To turn is to trope. To trope is to become reflexive. To recognise a system. To take apart a componentry. To group it together. To turn our backs upon it. The object lesson flattens us, unstitches us as so much material in an unstable world. We all turn. We all twist. We are all victims of asymmetry. And yet of course we never see it. To turn is to place us into a moment of vulnerability. We are exposed to our own flattening, our own materiality, an object to be used, to be turned.

Walker exhibits this asymmetrical relation most pointedly in her use of technology. The necklace of old cellphones that have been colour-coded for instance. Could this not just have been an exercise in colour therapy, a therapeutic balm? And yet is it not also tabulated, sorted. Tabled as so many items. No longer so simply strung-up detritus, but an assimilated material ready for re-absorption. This flattened strata, these elemental objects that resist further reduction! Is this not the same strategy she deploys with her laptop necklaces, emphatically doubling down, in the way she punctures the screen, perforates its functionality? Could this not be a doubling of the necklace's burden? Its noose-like qualities? Walker ensnares the wearer. Doesn't her laptop necklace look too cumbersome? Like they're trapping the wearer. Literally weighing them down. Of course isn't that the point? Isn't the wearer enthralled by this very irreverence? How oddly rejuvenated this material becomes, something once so necessary, so vibrant, so life enhancing, is now dormant, burdensome, stationary. Strung up.

This flattening is similarly apparent in the pendants Walker tabulates various phrases upon. Whether it's the Forrest Gump-esque, "the only thing better than a good friend is a good friend with chocolates" or the biblical, "Rejoice in the Lord", these found expressions function as wider instances of language's remnant. Of an expression that is left behind, much as the obsolete cellphones Walker colour-codes similarly undergo iterations of change. We can go further here though because we know from Paolo Virno that cliché functions as a contemporary millstone, a weight-bearing structure that illuminates how sentiment circulates within a populace. We can see this in Walker's handling of cliché as a flattened material, one reflective not just of a culture, as it might have been when she takes advantage of what she calls "NZ women with brash voices", but reflective of the viral capacity of language to move with sentiment. Here the asymmetrical treatment of the remnant, no longer just left dormant, but highlighted, made to be re-worn as a tired, trite expression, becomes a reflexive gesture.

Language, in the way Walker is using it here in these pendants, is no longer a passive element, but what David Wills calls 'tropological'. That is, Walker's treatment of kitsch expression, highlights how language is never simply a "mute instrument for conveying information", but a technology that turns with the populace. For Wills this means language isn't a passive form to be taken up, but an asymmetrical condition, a material that propels the human along. Only reflexive gestures like those of Walker's make it possible to see this expanse, this flattening of the human as one ingredient encoded in technologies of the self.

Wills labels this flattening "a technological turn". Like his recognition of the tropological speed of language, a language that turns on the populace, that propels the populace, this technological turn imprecates us, makes us complicit. Technology is our habitus. Technology in this instance is no longer uniform but fluid. It is transformative but it is also a loose and flexible term that encompasses the most basic forms of motility (that of an animation for life). In a way, Wills encases the standing upright of the human, the evolutionary impulse that changes us from amphibious ancestors, with this technological encoding of the human. The two cannot be separated but are functioning forms of the technological embellishment of life. In this instance, technology is no longer a platform to be exploited, as tech-moguls would have it, but a paradigm through which life is mobilised. Jewellery in this instance becomes technologised. It is no longer just an adornment but a measure by which we account for the world.

Of course, what we are really talking about is the flattening of this turn, which is Wills' other point. That we can't identify this technological turn without turning our back to it. He calls this a dorsal turn. As he writes: "the dorsal names the unseen, that is not the same as the invisible... What is behind cannot be seen without a turning... [it] implies before all else a coupling with otherness". This I think accounts for the sheer weirdness of Walker's jewellery. That punkish caterwauling character, as though she is a kitchen sink bricoleur concocting shlock assemblages. Think how often she is dumped into the provocateur category as though her assemblages are merely meant to shock rather than to document and account, to tabulate the shifting mechanisms through which the dorsal turn reveals itself to us. Take the pendant composed from a used toothpaste tube, a prescription medicine vial, a digital watch and an empty drink container. Is this not a tabulating of the mechanisms through which life is enhanced? Do we not see it only in its expended form, in the reflexive moment of its remnant as used, disembodied, technology? We turn our back on this otherness, witness it only after the fact. As Wills makes explicit, this condition is hiding in plain sight, always just behind us, just a turn away: "the human is from the point of view of this turn, indebted to become technological as soon as it becomes human, to always already [be] turning that way".

This is certainly explicit in Walker's recent work which is decidedly humanoid. Hands embrace, masks fecundly sprout. Some of these share similarities with Francis Upritchard's humanoid forms sharing a kindred penchant for coloured flesh and quasi-totemic structures. Walker's hanging beads, in particular, hint at a kind of tribal futurism as it does in Upritchard's posthumanist fantasy. This kind of flattening of the strata,

the devolved human as a kind of undoing of the phallogocentrism of Western hubris, is of course another instance of Walker's preoccupation with this dorsality, this hidden dimension. Take the necklace of two interlinked hands, a green hand and a magenta hand, fingers woven together with beads hanging down off it. What is this but some sort of universal gesture? A binding together of goodwill or the entangled entreatment of a cosmopolitan politic of making do? The beads hang down as though bearing fruit, but it's important to realise the necklace is worn. The hands will bob, the finger jointing will flex. The beads dangling twice fold. It becomes a second-order reflection. The prosthetic extension of the cosmopolitic. Or at least the proffered hope of. And yet, and yet! What for? Why do we need to simply phrase the cosmopolitic and not enact it? Why do we keep it at hand's length? To mark its occasion, to reflect upon it only in this ornamental fashion? The answer is of course that the cosmopolitics is enacted, is deliberately asymmetrical. It is a technology like any other. Secondary, after the fact. Like gesture, the cosmopolitic is fleeting and yet so central to life. We need the flattened dorsality of Walker's provocation to see this hidden dimension. Always just behind us, always propelling us forward.

Hamish Win / Lisa Walker, Technology's Ruses

You don't have to like fortnite

all those things have been sucked away from us
so what is your point
i'm passionate about language

it's the weaponisation of language
~~community~~ is one of them
you cannot measure it on a spreadsheet
everyone's using therapy speak
i don't have capacity for this
i'm sorry nobody does
i'm not settling for this reality
i hate the word kiwis
you and your friends are the ~~community~~

these are invisible issues
things that happen inside of us as individuals as much as they happen on a
systematic scale ~~community~~ gets talked about as a practical thing
i don't think that's the case
it's how we experience our relationship to other people
do you have the tools to be able to understand that you are not the individual self?

i think of it from the inside out rather than the outside in

the conversations i can have with my close friends are not the same as the
conversations i have in ~~community~~
i don't need to be friends with everyone i'm in ~~community~~ with
~~community~~ becomes the c word when i start to resent it
and then it turns into super intense friendships

and you get to some actual human stuff



it's important who's invited
i'm thinking about diversity in a room, really who should be there
were you there?
we were vetted
i kind of appreciated that
i felt safe

it's sort of like those layers of loneliness
often people don't make those connections themselves

you're trying to serve something bigger
if you're bringing people together underneath an umbrella

how many people can fit in a room to make it comfortable
i don't know how valuable it is to say there should be 20 māori

you don't have to like fortnite

every bundle of friends forms different kinds of ~~community~~
it morphs into different shapes and numbers
would you call four people a ~~community~~
we have shared understandings of things and it can just be two of us

i love being in the same space as someone that I have very little in common with
not to talk about raves again

i think that's insane to look at a stranger and be like

people are so nice to me when i have chilli
why don't we see a stranger and be like
i do that
just drop a compliment
the guy who had the painting was walking down the street
i was like "love your artwork"
he told me the story and we stood there and talked about the artwork

i had something to say about it but i forgot

earlier today when we talked about the c word and that it was churchy and colonisey
all the great cs
christchurch canterbury

there were all these millennial soundtracks and then they played scribe

Bea Gladding / A dinner with friends, my house in Addington, Ōtautahi, March 2026.

"There are no subcultures anymore. It's about the remix."

— Lotta Volkova, BoF, 2016

Has anyone coined a term for the practice of combining two abstracted or de-contextualised elements to create a distinct third?

I ponder this formula while minding Ana Iti's Ngahere Behind a Pile of Metal; suspended chain-link strops framed by gradients of kauri ash and

charcoal applied to the gallery walls. In 2022 the same room housed Edward's noisy ghost by James Oram, whose materials list read "Audio recording of Propaganda (1928) by Edward Bernays, water bottle, tactile transducer". These works' material lists function as clues to a riddle, the key discernible through the exhibition text or the help of a docent. Visitors pop their heads in, not daring to step foot in the space, take a quick glance around and turn back the way they came. Sometimes I can hear them whisper "not for me". I meet the panicked gaze of parents whose child asks "what is that?".

This isn't a diss, there's something about these works that I really like, but sometimes it does just feel like a big conceptual puzzle. Friends of mine assisted Zac Langdon-Pole on a new suite of collages – two enormous jigsaw puzzles are combined to reveal a new image in the positive/negative. I'm not trying to be cynical, but it's literally a puzzle. I can't help but feel as though these works are a commentary on the trends of contemporary art making.

Oscar Enberg, *Debutante* (2022): oil paint on cast plaster (of a sheep's jawbone), hand-sewn silk taffeta gown and boned corset

Shiraz Sadikeen, *Washer* (2022): dollar coin and bone wax

Shiraz Sadikeen and Felix Henning-Tapley, Evelyn Waugh (2024): dressing gown from Park Hyatt™ Auckland, champagne bottle and cork

I have made works like this before too.

Found nude photograph, H&H singlet, wire hanger

Comme des Garçons underpants, Skjellerup wading boots

Framing offcuts, wooden spoon, rubber band, nail

I smell of cigarettes, sunblock, radish and vetiver. I'm wearing a hole-ridden white t-shirt that belonged to my mother when I was a baby, my grandfather's Yves Saint Laurent navy woollen sports coat, black jeans that have gone shiny at the knees and a pair of work boots. I glance up at the overhead screens and notice that the inflight trivia quiz now contains pictorial riddles, or maybe it always has. When I land I turn my phone off flight mode and check a message from my sister – a photo of neatly arranged unicorn figurines, gemstones, zoo animals and Sylvanian Families captioned 'H's assemblage <3'.

When I came down with a bad case of man-flu, I spent three days in bed playing *The Sims 2*. My virtual self got really good at painting, and unlocked the ability to make 'custom paintings'. This allows you to import images into the game for your sim to then paint. I downloaded a bunch of paintings by the Canadian artist Alex Colville, whose paintings from the 70s closely resemble the art style of *The Sims 2* – a kind of pointillist realism. In the 1984 documentary *Alex Colville: The Splendour of Order*, Colville explains that living in rural Nova Scotia allows him total separation from 'the art game'. We all know which game he's referring to, but the contemporary obsession with abstraction via assemblage has given the term a dual meaning.

In Episode 24 of Taylor Ervin's Youtube series *Scorned by Muses*, he visits Trisha Donnelly's show at Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt. Several pseudo-alien archaeological artifacts in marble, concrete and stone are presented alongside an antique wooden desk and evergreen tree branches. Taylor coolly articulates hot takes in real time, suspending disbelief to imagine the celestial provenance of the objects before him. He really likes the work and suggests that anyone who doesn't must lack imagination. He remarks that the pacing guards, flitting past and avoiding eye contact, heighten the show's existing sense of strangeness and paranoia.

When I'm gallery-minding I'm conscious of respecting visitors' imaginative autonomy, but feel I'm doing the work an injustice if I'm not forthcoming with crucial contextual information. The information I relay is evolving, shaped by the responses of previous visitors. I stress that although the artist has an intended framework for which the work can be understood, the most rewarding and exciting part of looking at art is the free association it demands of you. It can dig up forgotten memories and reference points, and can alter the way you experience the outside world from then on – every time I hang out the washing I think about Grant Lingard's *Swan Song* (1996). These are the conditions which make this kind of art possible and in my opinion, interesting. Yet, working in a large public gallery has shown me how easy it is to find this stuff grating and pretentious when what is being asked of us is unclear. Perhaps this is all to say that I too fall victim to cynicism when I forget that I'm allowed to simply look and feel.

Oscar Bannan / Found objects and cryptic assemblage in contemporary sculpture



Some artwork from the early twenty-first century will endure, but the greatest value of this time period may be its role as a grand social experiment. We asked the question: What happens when we greet the tidal wave of postmodernism – the dreaded cultural logic of late capitalism – with open arms and put up no resistance? (W. David Marx, *Blank Space*, p. 281)

Curb is a Christchurch skate brand and vintage store off Cashel Street. The owner, Gerard, I've been told, is an OG chch skater and DJ known as Garage. I work the weekends alone. I get to play my own music. Dance (Louie Vega Latin Soul Version) by 3 Winans Brothers and The Clark Sisters gets people moving. The store has old Swannndri, denim jeans and jackets, coats, workwear, army surplus, boots and sneakers, sportswear, skateboard decks, cabana, hawaiian, flannel, and dress shirts, hoodies, sweaters, jackets, t-shirts. So many t-shirts. All of them have some decal or print: bands, tv shows, film, games, radio stations, concerts, advertisements, political campaigns, agitprop, protests, jokes, skate and streetwear logos and designs, hype collabs, memorabilia, souvenirs, statements.

Online, I heard a few authors discuss how they each work with lists. One said the literary use of lists is indicative of the merchant class. They didn't clarify whether this was the historic merchant

class or a kind of present middle class, which is what the other authors assumed. Did the emergence of lists as an accepted or respected literary device come first from merchant activity? Now we can say it is necessitated by its omnipresence. So many proper nouns: Hendrix, Cobain, Motörhead, Harley Davidson, Manchester United, Tupac, Einstein, Supreme, Enjoi, Bitch, Alien Workshop, World Industries, Levi's, Wrangler, Akademiks, Canterbury, Swannndri, Fairydown, Lord of the Rings, FUBU, Dexter's Lab, The Simpsons, Nike, Adidas, Vans, Burberry, Bob Marley, Heineken, Comme Des Garçons, Ronaldo, KMS, No Fear, Billabong, Quicksilver, Mambo, Curb, Pink Floyd, South Park, Energizer, X-Men, Halo. Not the 'clean nouns' of Veronica Patterson's *A Charm Against the Language of Politics*: "weeping birch, bloodstone, tanager, / Banshee damask rose. Read field guides, atlases, / gravestones." I can't "recite the tough, silky structure of webs" of which she lists six. My mind is addled with brands. Apparently US kids are donning Cobain t-shirts and calling it preppy. Last year I saw Basquiat in a Uniqlo season. All these anti-establishment artists. What do their faces and work signal now? They have become dirty nouns.

"Why are the prices so dear?"

I don't know, sweet old lady. I'm sorry. This is a second-hand shop but it isn't. It's 'curated'. I mean, it's a selection of special

pieces. Rare, old things. Collectors' items. Like, that Man' United top is \$225. Sex Pistols, \$400. Somewhere along the way people became attached to these things, icons, events of the past. They tell a particular story about us. Or they just have pretty things on them.

"Enjoi. Nice. Are you a skater?"

"No. I'm just getting it because I've always wanted a t-shirt with a panda on it."

The most materialistic understand. The hypebeasts, "Oh yo! They got Kanye West's Graduation. Is it an original?"

Something something capitalism, something about flattening of culture... Cultural stagnation...The t-shirt is a tomb. Are we paying homage and respect to periods of values, morals, codes? Or are we morbidly disregarding it all? Finding expression and meaning in the excess. The so far gone-ness. There is a story society tells about itself here. And yet, on an individual level, there's sentimentality. I see it in earnest lining the shelves by the desk. DVDs of skate films. There are also vinyls, cds, VHSs, patches, knick-knacks, posters and t-shirts that aren't for sale. They mean something to someone. This cultural debris captures a part of our personal histories. Digging through the t-shirt racks feels like an excavation of material in the recesses of the mind.

Hours among the t-shirts, dirty nouns and dust.

Kosta Bogoievski, Curb, Ōtautahi
Christchurch

I appreciate the process of creating inventories. For me, it's not just about listing or archiving; it's about creating a space that reflects my presence through objects. I find beauty, creativity, and a strange certainty in the incompleteness of these lived-in spaces. Perhaps I think of these as a refuge – a haven where love and curiosity thrive, where once painful, now distant memories can resurface without leaving the presence of heavy, oppressive weight in tow.

Joanna Margaret Paul's words, "For myself as a poet, I must find some way of expressing the sacredness of what I refuse to name" resonate with me. Her ability to immerse herself in the ineffable is neither mystic nor unattainably idealistic; rather, it reflects a sense and passing of time manifesting itself in one's surroundings with intention, care and spontaneity.

Inventories

sensual maternal
domestic life
unfold on itself
a rendition of
floating chaos
half scribbled
music notation
conceal crannies
books on anything
fill shelves
children's art
embellish rimu walls

walking shoes
a friend's knitted hat
textured cushions
half cups of tea
an inherited piano
hold permanent
rent-free lodging
in the crevices of
shared lives

a cat yowls to be fed
grass needs mowing
sun floods a living
all-purpose room
for winter daydreaming
rough-hewn mantel
curates communal psyche
surrendering unhurriedly
into unfiltered light

Cindy Zeiher / Joanna Margaret Paul, *Imagined in the Context of a Room*, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū, 2021



Since working in a Sydney commercial gallery in my 20s I've always found discomfort in visiting them. The gallerist would inspect the surveillance cameras in real time and was known to announce that the gallery visitor was "dressed like a student." Which was code for them being an artist and therefore not rich enough to buy art. So I always feel like an infiltrator. That I'm not the right audience. But I was always going to be an audience of Marie Shannon's *Life Stories* at Trish Clark. It's an archive/stockroom show of photographs and moving image works dating from the early eighties to the not-quite-present. It represents various bodies of work, packed uncomfortably full, hence my inclination to describe it as a stockroom show.

Regardless of the context, seeing Marie's work is always like seeing a favourite band play live. All the big feelings that come with that. I'm really a huge fan and find endless fascination in both her thematic and formal dexterity, lithely slipping in and out of genres, moods and methodologies, all with immense silver gelatin printing technicality. Here the show starts with a quiet little photograph titled *The Decisive Moment* (1982), awkwardly tacked onto the edge of a series of five larger scale *Daybed* works. By my calculation it's the only work included from Marie's time at Elam and is such an outlier in the show – its tiny scale, blithe immediacy, surreptitious perspective – that had I not taken the roomsheet I might have thought I'd imagined rather than remembered it. From an elevated perspective a foreshore is pictured, no horizon, just sand and sea taking up equal halves of the photo plane. There are a lot of footprints in the sand, and some waves in the ocean. The lone figure in a bundle of coats and the choppy sea give the air a bite. Almost imperceptible, just to the right of the figure, is a tiny dark smudge. I know the smudge to be a dog running and almost disappeared by a slow shutter speed.

Likely in reference to Henri Cartier-Bresson's photobook of the same title, 'the decisive moment' describes a specific process of documentary photography by which the photographer simultaneously recognises the significance of an event, as well as the momentarily perfect arrangement of elements within the frame. The majority of Shannon's work here is staged photography – single objects often on a black background, simultaneously controlled and un-anchored, or constructed and purposefully situated architectural maquettes. Cartier-Bresson's title for the French edition is *Images à la Sauvette* (*Images on the Run*), which I took to mean images having their own agency, moving through time and place with dexterity, nipping between contexts and encounters, but of course could also mean the act of documentary photography.

Weeks later I keep coming back to Shannon's *The Decisive Moment* – a quiet and little auspicious omen.

An image that is on the run, off through the decades like an off-lead dog.

A score for how to read everything that came after it.

A ghost story where a photographer comes to realise – after making a lot of photographs, becoming a mother, losing a partner, and compiling an archive/stockroom exhibition comprising four decades of work – that this photograph she took of a figure on the beach in the early 80s was, in fact, a photograph of herself, running.

Sophie Bannan / Marie Shannon, *Life Stories*, Trish Clark Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, March 2026

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I feel the slip of the ribbon between my fingers, and I am six years old, and my mother is haloed under the kitchen light, bent over her sewing machine, making my tutu for an upcoming ballet recital. She takes a ribbon, lines it up, slowly presses her foot down on the pedal.

Come here, she says.

I go, not willingly, because I am six and sleepy. I trudge over, start playing with the rosettes on the table. She takes the pins out of her mouth.

Stop tutūing, she says. Hold still. Hold STILL.

//

I wind the ribbon around my hand, and I am seventeen, and my mother is up late, bent over her sewing machine, making my high school ball gown. In one hand she holds the skirt, in the other a measuring tape.

Come here, she says.

I go, not willingly, because seventeen.

Now how long do you want the top? I gesture halfway up my stomach.

She laughs. May as well go in your bra. She takes a ribbon, holds it up against the fabric.

And this is the colour you want for the straps?

I fold my arms, nod.

She turns back to the machine, starts the pedal. Hāngī pants, she whispers to my sister. We crack up.

///

I twist the ribbon, and I am at Te Puna o Waiwhetū, learning to weave from the artist Serene Hodgman. I am always captivated by Serene's work, ensorcelled by the jewel-like clusters of flowers in her delicious, meticulously handcrafted pieces. In the gallery upstairs, I lean in close to one of her larger artworks, studying the way she paints with ribbon on mat; a petal suggested through a long stitch, a curled leaf by a curt loop. I want to roll up the mat, tuck it under my arm, run out the door, keep it for myself – or at least pluck one of the flowers, slip it behind my ear like Mum would do. Serene tells us about her mother, and her nana, and the many women from whom she has learned to weave. This is the way the work is done: a group of women, watching, listening, talking, laughing, singing. Fingers flashing. Deftly, Serene shows our group how to use a pin and ribbon to weave up from the centre of the mat, and down, and then where to start the next row, so that we will eventually make a flower of our own. This is where stories are told, too. As we practise, the women at my table talk about



their kids, their husbands, their friends, their work. Sometimes, we fall silent, absorbed in the rhythm of a stitch. Serene says that she often begins once her kids have gone to bed. This is where memories are made, too: in the held breath of night, a mother, up late, bent over her work.

////

Serene directs us to choose a mat and ribbon for our own piece. I pick a mat – turquoise blue – and a hot pink ribbon. Mum’s favourite colours. I find the centre. I take a pin, pierce it through the ribbon, pull it up through the mat, and weave a flower for my mother.

Tessa Boraston / Ribbon Weaving with Serene Hodgman, *Made in the Pacific: A Collection of Tāoga*, Knowledge Sharing Session, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū, March 2026

Ana Iti’s *Ngahere Behind a Pile of Metal* installation extends the matter of natural ecologies to include the mechanics of their destruction. The forms of sawblades used in kauri logging are transferred into a pattern of giant white teeth with charcoal borders on the gallery wall. They could be huge cresting waves. Either way, the sounds of each image, the buzzing saw, the thrashing waves, are notably absent. Iti suspends floor-to-ceiling slings of grease-blackened shipping chains to emphasise the cutting, logging, transport of native wood via waterways and shipping lanes. The row of chains spans the entire space on a diagonal. They mimic marine cranes, but at this scale, with those giant watery teeth on the walls behind, the log I imagine running through them is four metres across and impossibly tall. I feel like a tiny tree dweller. The forms evoke a fear for the trees, which are present through implication, or echo, like their sonic siblings. Their ash is spread on the walls to make the jagged blade edges. They have been cut, burnt and are not here.

The signage in the space says the whole room is the installation. The charcoal and the chains on their apparatus of suspension are the only two elements, but the sign is right, I am immersed. In this space the history of kauri deforestation, its relationship to water, and the ongoing risks to climate can all be read in the huge and sparse elements of the work. White walls, a dark stone floor, the chains between and the smeared grey waves are their own collapsed ecology, rich with relationships. Māori ancestral narratives linking kauri to tohorā and the sea, care with/in te taiao, clash with kauri dieback, deforestation and endangered species. Much like the repeated chain-links, these systems in conflict are tethered to each other in this space. “Behind a pile of metal” was an instruction Iti was given about where to find some kauri trees on her hapū land. The metal and trees are a reflection of ecologies in their expanding meaning as the word spirals out from its traditional ‘natural’ imagery to include intersectional communities. There are no wild places, but there is always adaptation and persistence.

Meg Doughty / *Ana Iti, Ngahere Behind a Pile of Metal*, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū, March 2026

“We don’t want stage management,” Dr. Pedro Ilgenfritz tells students when I sit in on one of their self-creation sessions. Ilgenfritz is the relatively new artistic director of Hagley Theatre School, a well-established Christchurch institution that underwent a radical reconstruction in 2024 when Cameron Mattox retired. Gone is the slightly stale whiff of Stanislavski, gone is text-reverence. The body is so in, the body is the material. Drawing primarily on the methodologies of Jacques Lecoq, the new-look Hagley Theatre School barely focuses on text at all.

Every week, students attend training sessions from 8.30am to 12.30pm. After a half-hour lunch-break students spend the afternoon embarking on what Ilgenfritz calls ‘self-creation’ – in which students each week create a new piece of theatre based on a specific prompt. Every Friday at 1pm, students perform this work for each other and engage in rigorous critical discussion.

There are only a few rehearsal rooms I’ve ever been in as generous. Much of the strongest theatre I’ve seen in Christchurch has been material I viewed as a guest audience member at Hagley Theatre School for these self-creation sessions.

In part, this is because the act of training is an act of paying attention.

On the day I visit, students are working with the elements – performing in neutral masks as animated by fire and water.

“But be careful,” Pedro says. “You have to be very careful not to describe fire, not to describe water.” Everything vanishes when it is described. That’s what Diane Seuss meant when she said, “Show me the bird, not the image of the bird.” And when students try to intellectualise, talk about whether they ‘liked’ the self-creation or not, Pedro, always gentle, nudges them back on track.

“OK, so you liked it. But was it fire?”

On the other hand, when I work as a writing teacher, I’m often forced by curriculum demands to teach supposedly stable categories like ‘description’ and ‘imagery.’ As a result, student texts tend towards simulations built through the act of remembering what they’ve been told is ‘right’.

Grasping so tightly on to the ‘right’, it’s easy to forget that in any text the right word is selected in lieu of every other right word, for example rhinoceros for tunnel, tunnel for forget...

Josiah Morgan, student writing and performance, whilst reading *My Struggle* by Karl Ove Knausgaard

When dry clay touches water, it fizzes and crackles. It ignites, as flame to paper. My heart, when I call you, your formless voice crackling through the phone, also fizzes and crackles. It ignites, flame to paper.



Lately I've been finding relief in diminishing the loud existential experience of self into relation with the trees around my home. I am particularly attentive to two kauri trees, who are remnants from the days before Kapanga was dramatically altered, its old-growth kauri forest all but deforested. I am so small underneath these kauri trees, and I listen to their creaking responses, as currents of breeze move through their branches, and kākā rustle around to extract seeds from their cones. Bring my attention to these relations, and suddenly the singularity of my experience is dwarfed. Temporality, understood through the senses, deepens; beyond the present, time devolves and becomes larger and longer than just me.

I've been learning from Tuvaluan/Irish educator Leah Manaema Avene. Every Thursday I have been calling in, staring at my screen in my hand, watching Leah and the faces of other humans from around the world gather online, 6pm AEST, to share stories of land, community and reflect on what she names "colonial fragmentation disorder." I don't know the backgrounds of most of the people I spend the two month journey with – we are encouraged to leave conventional introductions and their hierarchies out of our sharing. At first there is an opaqueness to this forum; I feel strange and alone, unfamiliar with these faces and the stories speaking out at me from across timezones. But very quickly an intimacy forms.

Leah speaks to the Polynesian concept of *vā* and this bridges the distances between all the faces on the screen. *Vā* traces connection as alive, consisting of rights and responsibilities, of reciprocities, between human and non-human communities, land, ocean and spirit. *Vā* is a condition we can enter into, and something we also create through ways of being with others in time and space. *Vā* is the polyphonic multilogue, an experience of temporality that rejects temporariness at its very core, because true relationship is always far-reaching, forwards and backwards.

Vā calls on the sensuous nature of being alive. Through Zoom, interactions have the potential to be flattened through remote mediation, but Leah invites a responsiveness that ignites connection. In the silences between participants self-nominating to speak, I feel my heart and breathing quicken. And then there is the poetry. What a source of *vā*, as the dry clay is to water, as the wind is to the trees. The tenderness of poetry disperses itself throughout the conversation, to de-escalate tension, to focus the wandering threads, to distil our fears and hopes into a perfect flame of language.

What is the language of intimacy we speak and sound out in response to changing proximities? When we are conscious of the space between us, how does it inflect our relationships?

For example, when I am on the shoreline, my body is heavy, brittle. In water, its physical burden is lightened. It speaks of relief – my singularity balloons.

For example, when clay is bone dry from exposure to air and light, and then suddenly submerged in water, it sounds out a fizzling and crackling.

And when clay turned ceramic is removed from a kiln at 100 degrees to meet room temperature conditions, it pings and sings a tiny chorus of contraction.

Bodies gather, tuck on couches, lean against each other on the floor, stand side by side. This is how we come together to listen to *Vā*, an 11-track sound exploration by producer and artist Matt Sephton. He and his partner, ceramic artist Caitlin Moloney, have welcomed us into their home to be a part of the album release. The occasion follows a two and a half month residency at Tiapapata Art Centre in Samoa last year, and is an invitation for wider reflection and sharing of this experience. It is a warm evening in late March. The valley responds to the arrival of autumn by softening, its colours bruising like the flesh of fig in my hand.

Children are running around barefoot, Matt's dad Pete is there smiling his warm smile, I'm swept up in welcomings and hellos from various neighbours, locals. Inside the living room Matt's desk is set up with his hydrophone, jars of water and clay, his sound system and computer. There is a projector in the centre of the room, and to the left of this is *Skin*, a ceramic sculpture, more like a creaturely being.

Skin is the result of Caitlin's thinking through her relationship to place and material during the residency. Clay is materially responsive to its environment, just as the artist is. To construct *Skin*, a piece hand-built over weeks and then decorated with Caitlin's distinctive intricate geometric patterns, a partnership of attention is required: the clay's response to the atmospheric conditions of the island climate, and the artist's problem-solving. *Skin* is the kind of work that comes from an artist not just thinking through material and design questions with the head, but with the hands, the belly, the feet. I read that Caitlin felt as if a taproot had sunk deep into the earth – taproot being the most central, deep-reaching root of a plant.

If *Skin* is the material outcome of Caitlin's making and responding to the elemental and environmental *vā* of her surroundings, Matt's album is the sonic mirror. *Skin* is matter, it is of earth and fire, it is precision and geometry, the symmetry of an insect's wings, the venations of a leaf, the shell of a turtle. The sounds of *Vā* are air and water, what moves between us – amorphous, fluvial,

encompassing, a flow state of sounds, murmurations, songs of human and non-human voices.

The sensuous, sensorial vibration of sound brings us into relationship with our corporeal site of meeting, within space and time. This is what Matt's album reveals. *Vā* is a project that melds field recordings, hydrophone textures, bass-heavy electronica and collaborative voices to map space into sound. Floating is the first track, and he settles us into the soundscape by dropping dry clay into a jar of water, demonstrating the process for collecting sounds through this technology. I become more sensitive to this collision of clay and water. What may have been limited to visual becomes auditory, and also physical, my skin tingling and fizzing along with the clay. A hush descends over the room – it feels like we are dissolving together.

These collected sounds become textures that enrich the electronic field which builds over the course of the album, creating an experience that is deeply tonal and evocative of place – 'place' here being both the physical locale of Samoa, and also the liminal, energetic place of relationship, where possibility and potential map no known landscape. Through sounds evoking the site of culture – the tapping of *pātē* (traditional hand-held log drums), *fa'asala* (singing and chanting), and *fagufagu* (Samoan nose flute) – Matt locates the album in the environment of its origin, bringing the atmosphere of the island into relation with the electronic rhythms to invoke the polyphony of *vā*.

In the space between *Skin* and Matt's sound desk, there is a projector which plays footage filmed by Matt over the course of the residency. The surface of water rippling melts into footage of Caitlin building up the structure of *Skin*, painting the body with different coloured slips. We watch as she and Matt carefully carry the massive sculpture and place it in the kiln. Later, footage of a fellow artist, Ghanaian papermaker *Awal*, demonstrating the process of making paper from the surrounding plants, mirrors the care and craftsmanship of Caitlin's work. The

final sequence shows locals preparing food for *umu*, the communal rhythms of these preparations echoing through the last track, with the chatter of birds and children murmuring against a backdrop of rustling leaves, flickering flames, and a gentle drumbeat.

The richness of the audio doesn't necessitate these visuals, and yet they draw us further into an intimate experience of place, whilst also capturing something of the generative quality of *vā*. Watching the meticulous, loving way food is prepared for the communal *umu*, or how *Awal* carefully processes plant fibre through multiple stages of washing and sieving, or how Caitlin works with layers of clay and slips to construct *Skin* – this footage deepens what the album achieves through sound, projecting a reverence and reciprocity that exists through relationships particularly engaged with the matter of place.

Traversing the sonic territories of the album *Vā* pulls us into a multiplicity of time zones and physical experiences. I'm conscious of how the various sound and visual technologies Matt employs to deepen this feel inherently contradictory against the spectral quality of *vā*; but then I think of those Thursday Zoom calls, or how after the album release I will call you, your voice reaching back to me through the device in my hand. Where these technologies have the potential to snatch us away from the sacred relational space of *vā*, there is also the possibility for connection to materialise right from within that liminal, non-physical realm, the very one that sound inhabits. Here is where we can find a bridging of intimacies when distance may place us physically apart from loved persons, homes and culture.

In *vā* is the relief from the singular. In listening to *Vā*, we are reminded of – even better welcomed into – the chorus.

Millie Godfery / Matt Sephton and Caitlin Moloney, *Vā* album release show, Coromandel, March 2026

The Pleasures of Sorrow

Where do we *put* our grief? Particularly that which is not our own – this inexplicable grief. Death of a friend of a friend. Death of a Facebook friend. Death of a child so far away. Death of someone who, and all your colleagues are afraid to say it, doesn't matter. Not here, not now; not when we are so busy. These deaths are not worth annual leave, perhaps not worth a comment, perhaps not worth a direct message. Worth, maybe, a quiet thought alone, from the safety of our desks, knowing the family (should they have any) will spend thousands and thousands of dollars (should they have any) to keep them over the hill and far, far away.

Were we fools to think we could stave it off this long?

“...rending garments, tearing the hair, thumping the face and eyes, burning the body with small piercing firebrands, beating the head with stones till the blood ran...” (George Turner, Samoa, A Hundred Years Ago and Long Before, 1884)

This way in which our tupu’aga, our old ones mourned.

And what if we did? Lash at our chests, let them all know something is missing – let them all know we are on every kind of leave. We are on annual leave, we are on sick leave, we are on mental health leave, we are on bereavement leave. We are on holiday. *We are drowning in the pleasures of sorrow.* We are signalling to each other, like ethylene rising from acacia, like crows swarming over Tel Aviv, that it matters when 100,000 innocent lives are taken. It matters every year.

Of our traditional funerary practices, Reverend John B. Stair of the London Missionary Society once wrote that we Sāmoans would *“pour forth lamentations both real and feigned”*. (J. B. Stair, Old Samoa, or, Flotsam and Jetsam from the Pacific Ocean, 1897)

“Both real and feigned.”

And I get it: whether we can summon the tears or not, we must cry, because we owe that much to the dead – this rippling death, this great tōtara that tears down through the bush and leaves its young-winged residents homeless in its wake. We owe this, too, to the living – they must be reminded, in our outstretched and contorted grief, in our defacing of ourselves, that their grief is real. Because we know that the worst ghost is that which is held inside the belly of a nation – unmourned, unhealed – left to fester. There, now, is an unhygienic, and a dangerous death.

So we must find those who will lead us in our mourning.

Lisa Tui, one of my whāea, a maternal figure in my life, had been in talks with Kevin Toolis.

He’s a poet of the Irish bardic tradition, she explained. An author and award-winning documentary filmmaker; one of those scholars that can recount the *Iliad* like a raucous weekend. Because they have walked the earth, because they have known death. And here was Kevin Toolis, bard, wanderer, on the first floor of Tūranga, across from Cathedral Square, speaking on his 2018 book, *My Father’s Wake: How the Irish Teach Us to Live, Love and Die*.

Lisa opened Toolis’ talk with a waiata. Her tūi voice, a guitar, a loop pedal. She talked of karanga. Three wāhine, e karanga ana, weaving a plait of wailing voices. To lead us in our mourning. To guide Spirit as it leaves Body, its most prized possession, in our inheritance.

Toolis told of keening. Three women, keening, weaving a plait of wailing voices; a rope to draw the spirits on their way. First to lay them before us, and then, all rites done, to draw them away.

First, to lay them before us. This is important. And then, away.

I sat, trying not to look too much at my own father, as Toolis spoke of his father’s wake, and the wakes of our old Irish people, and the wakes of the Trojans, and the wakes, the tangi, of all peoples of the world if you look deep enough. Everyone but us, really; us now, here, blue-lit.

Here, on the first floor of Tūranga, across from Cathedral Square, in the room where I’d taken shelter next to so many on that day of death. 15 March 2019. Where we’d watched death’s actual hand – his awkward, boyish hand – careen around the city’s corners, just blocks away, through strangers’ phones. We told them to turn it off. We kept watching.

In the days that followed, a hundred voices wrapped around them – that rope of spirit. They were brought before us, mourned in the daylight. And then, away.

We knew this death was real, could not be hidden. We lashed at ourselves because we knew we owed them this much.

For a moment, we remembered what it meant to mourn together.

I stirred to Toolis describing the “we death” – now out of fashion, but a life apart from this condemning, isolating “I death”; this death that profits on our early embalming and minimal fuss.

So Toolis talked through time of this “we death”, and how we have always slept, always swum; always awoken and been left in wake. And how, in whatever time this is – post-Cromwell, maybe – we are sleepless, and not quite awake; oblivious to death, and sorely, never quite knowing what Toolis calls “the pleasures of sorrow”. Maybe for a moment, before falling back into sleeplessness.

On the whim of some dark-humoured ancestor, the last reading I’d attended before Toolis’ was the book launch for Tusiata Avia’s *Giving Birth To My Father* (2025) – our esteemed oratress’ latest; an honest, long-laboured book of poems that interweaves the deeply personal and the profoundly universal. A raw expression of the Sāmoan death experience. The good, the bad, the ugly, the archetype; the Christian, the pagan; the ancient, the Pālagi.

The first section of her book is titled ‘How It Was Supposed To Go’, and the second ‘How It Went’. And isn’t that the story of all good bodies, left to be argued over by our myriad barking uncles and grasping aunties. Wondering where all the alofa goes, when even Spirit seems to leap out in a hurry, leaving its suitcase, in a rush along the whale road to Puluotu.

Enclosed in Avia’s ‘upu are all the beauty of the full choir and all the horror and confusion of the corporeal co-opt. Here, as keener, as ceremonial caller, she offers us pause, to consider *how it was supposed to go*. To lay our culture’s grief before us, and then, away.

At the heart of the modern Western discomfort towards this vast majority of indigenous funerary practices – our Irish wakes and our Sāmoan funerals included – is the fact that we welcome discordant extremes: where there is death, there is sex, there is birth. In this moment’s monoculture it might seem sick to celebrate all three, let alone in such quick succession. But I would put forward that this is the sensible way: at all ends, there is the same wailing, ushering us through life’s gateways.

One perspective in the Sāmoan indigenous frame of reference, as described by Sāmoan philosopher and former head of state Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi Efi, posits that we mortals, despite our grief, always end one up against the gods on account of our being able to procreate:

“We celebrate our past victories against the celestials and flaunt in chant and ritual our power to reproduce as a gesture of dismissing death because we have the power to make a new person. The principle objective of our funeral rites is to lift us into an emotional high in which life is equated with death and life and death become one and equal.” (Tui Atua, *In Search of Meaning, Nuance and Metaphor*, 2002)

In an experience that perhaps mirrors Toolis’ *pleasures of sorrow*, we follow our mourning by showing our mortality, flaunting our part in creation, giving life where life was taken.

For a glimpse into how this connects to a wider indigenous Pacific understanding of mortality, one need only consider whakataukī such as, “He ai atu tā te tangata, he huna mai tā Hine-nui-te-pō / Man begets, but the goddess of death destroys,” which invites us to dwell on these duelling natures – this ‘struggle without end’. The structure of the phrase implies responsibility: it is our responsibility to create, even as our creations, one by one, slip beyond us through the veil.

At risk of being too obscure: I am inviting you to consider this lens on the process of colonisation.



Consider the case of a genocidal government – one which, it could be said, fancies itself as a ‘god of death’. In this Sāmoan framework – the triumph of the mortals over the celestials – it can be seen as no coincidence that, through the centuries, indigenous peoples have persevered and outwitted every attempt at colonisation, devastation and genocide *through* creation – be it the literal act of human procreation, or the creation of visual art, music, poetry.

Even in this present age of apparently hyperaccelerated death which we face: through creation, resistance.

In one of many important passages of her book *Namesake: Reflections on a Warrior Woman* (2024), Palestinian and British author N.S. Nuseibeh speaks to the central importance of motherhood within Palestinian communities, and its place at the heart of Palestinian resistance:

“If we simply persist in existing, we will not so easily be erased. If we bear children to pass on our stories, our history will live on.” (N. S. Nuseibeh, 2024, p. 118)

Motherhood as resistance. New life as the hope that carries humanity through its suffering. The keening voice, the wailing voice, ushering humanity through life’s gateways.

All this to ask you the question I hear in Avia and Toolis’ works:

How do we mourn well?

Could it be to indulge in the pleasures of sorrow: to cry before each other?

And if we must fake it, to fake it well?

To create, unrestricted, unashamed, in wake of all our losses?

Is this not the essence of an Irish wake, a tangi, a Sāmoan funeral? To bring us remnants together, and use what’s left in the cupboard?

To fumble through old family names, to wax lyrical?

To laugh, to eat, perchance to fuck?

To bring about life, in naked defiance of death.

A devastating dirge and a sickly-sweet song of triumph.

THEREFORE

It has been grieved,
that we, *tāgata*, the mortals
– we ilo, the maggots
 born in the rot of the vine
 once sent to tie Earth’s young arms
 behind her back –
lost that child’s battle for un-death.
It has been known, and known again:
Māui, mortal after all, crushed in the thighs of the goddess of night.

But, if there ever was a war won
would it not be ours?

Breathing into each other
– swallowing each other –
only to live, and live again?
Forever falling backwards, through
each other, and the infinite
pleasures of sorrow.

Solomona Davis, *The Pleasures of Sorrow* / Tusiata Avia, *Giving Birth to My Father* book launch,
Space Academy, Ōtautahi Christchurch, November 2025 / Kevin Toolis, *How the Irish Teach us to
Live, Love And Die* with opening performance by Lisa Tui Jonathan, Tūranga, Ōtautahi Christchurch,
March 2026





When I think about what attention studies could mean in 2026, I think firstly of the need to return to materialist analysis. Or, in other words, to an approach that examines how material conditions shape the production, circulation and consumption of ideas. Recent events such as the release of the Epstein files and the ongoing genocide in Gaza have brought into focus the extent to which cultural and knowledge production are deeply entangled with political and economic interests – whether through the active cultivation of compatible ideology suggested by the former, or the waves of cancellation and censorship that have followed the latter. For those of us attempting to engage in cultural critique, I believe there is a

responsibility to better contextualise the work in question. To untangle the threads. To ask why certain ideological narratives are promoted and how these are structurally reproduced. To really pay attention.

In his book, *Who Paid the Pipers of Western Marxism?* (2025), Gabriel Rockhill details how the US national security state funded academics and higher educational institutions that espoused a version of leftism deemed compatible with capitalist and imperialist interests. This formed part of a sophisticated strategy to neutralise socialism and maintain global hegemony in the period following World War Two. It is worth noting that, during this time, socialist ideology experienced higher levels of support among those living within the imperial core, which existed against the backdrop of the Soviet Union's recent defeat of Nazi Germany. While the book focuses primarily on the Frankfurt School, Rockhill has indicated that two further books will follow on French critical theory and contemporary radical theory. This is not to say that the work produced by these intellectual traditions should be fully dispensed with, but rather that we should take care to properly situate and interrogate how it has functioned politically.

For example, a target of the third book is sure to be identity-based discourses centred on representation over redistribution. While there are certainly very good reasons why identity emerged as a dominant concern in the late 20th century, it is clear that these concerns have been subsequently divorced from their more revolutionary origins. The Combahee River Collective Statement of 1977, widely considered the first use of the term identity politics, explicitly linked identity with capitalism, imperialism and class struggle. Now, more often than not, what prevails is a hyper-individualised form of identity politics that is more concerned with "how we see ourselves" than "what kind of society we want to have." (Ash Sarkar, *Minority Rule*, p. 16) Rather than this being a simple case of these ideas being diluted over time, different forms of identity-based analysis have been selectively amplified, institutionalised and disseminated through self-reinforcing feedback loops based on their compatibility with existing power relations. A preoccupation with language, subjectivity and diversification of the ruling class can of course be much more easily accommodated than the fight for economic equality and social transformation.

These feedback loops are underpinned not always by coordinated intent, but by material forces and incentives. To explore this dynamic more concretely, imagine a young student attends university, hungry for an analytical framing that helps them make sense of a world they intuitively know to be unjust. The frameworks they encounter however are not neutral, but influenced by career aspirations, funding criteria, peer review, and the historical canonisation of particular discourses. Not to mention the lecturer's own educational background within this system. The student might go on to produce art work that reflects these learnings, which is then subsequently rewarded by cultural institutions that are also conditioned by funding and market pressures, as well as critical reception and social media metrics. Each of these is shaped by material incentives that feed back into and reinforce one another within a shared field of institutional constraint. Once the artist receives a certain level of success, they also have an increased interest in continuing to reproduce these ideologies.

These processes of structural filtering have helped lay the foundation for a situation where a politics initially rooted in anti-capitalism, imperialism and militarism has ended up being tacitly embraced by everything from multi-national corporations to the CIA. In 2021, the latter released a series of recruitment videos where employees including a gay librarian and a "cisgender millennial" Latin intelligence officer earnestly discuss the inclusive values of their workplace. These videos feature in *Cruise Missile Intersectionality*, an audio-visual performance by Mo Zareei (mHz) that is unflinching in its assessment of these issues. Zareei, an Iranian sound artist based in Te Whanganui-a-Tara, debuted the work at the Brisbane Powerhouse in 2024 and has since performed it on a number of occasions. One of the scheduled performances however was prevented when he was unable to leave his home city of Tehran as planned following Israeli bombardment in June last year. In a social media post announcing this cancellation, Zareei noted the bitter irony that the very imperial violence critiqued in the work was now the reason for his inability to perform it.

Zareei has modified the work slightly for each performance context, but the target remains liberal institutions that adopt the language of equality while providing cover for imperial domination: from media outlets such as the Guardian, BBC and New

York Times, to the land-acknowledging university and smiling “politics of kindness” advanced by the Jacinda-fronted Labour Party. This contradiction is addressed with scathing proclamations that flash across the screen in time with suitably brutal sonic abstraction. In the middle section of the work, the rhythmic structure is derived from the speech of the recruitment videos, while the original voices are heavily manipulated to emphasise the dissonance between the content of what is said and the context in which this is employed. The critique of the ways that legitimate concerns around women’s rights have been weaponised as pretext for military intervention feels especially pertinent in this moment, when US and Israeli bombs have been falling across Iran, Lebanon and Gaza. This is but one of many examples that demonstrate how an identity politics emptied of material considerations is entirely compatible with capitalist and imperialist power. At some point we must be honest with ourselves and actually pay attention to this reality.

Lucy Reid / Mo Zareei, *Cruise Missile Intersectionality*, 2024, <https://millihertz.net/cruise-missile-intersectionality>

ISSN 3142-0656

Attention Studies, no.2
April 2026

Published by The Physics Room, 301 Montreal Street,
Ōtautahi Christchurch 8013
Editing: Gwynneth Porter and Jane Wallace
Design: Warren Olds and Anna Welham
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This publication is funded by Creative New Zealand,
Christchurch City Council, Rātā Foundation and with
support from Copyright Licensing New Zealand and
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