

Inter Alia:

An Ontology of Contemporary Australian and New Zealand Artists' Practice

Alana Wilson

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Originality Statement

This is to certify that the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or purpose.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, and that all assistance received in preparing this thesis and all sources have been acknowledged.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the conceptual, material, and ethical dimensions of contemporary sculptural practice through the work of six artists connected to Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand: Hany Armanious, Kate Newby, Francis Carmody, John Ward Knox, Zac Langdon-Pole, and Francis Upritchard. The research explores intersections of materiality, artistic process, viewer experience, national identity (in art), and international art practice. It is informed by the author's own artistic practice in ceramics and sculpture, and unfolds through an autoethnographic lens, with critical analysis of artworks by the selected artists. The investigation is underpinned by a qualitative methodology, with interviews serving as the primary source of research, supplemented by secondary source analysis and personal encounters with the artists' work.

Key concerns addressed in this study include the role of tacit knowledge, embodied knowledge, and material agency - engaging with theoretical frameworks such as Vibrant Matter and Relational Aesthetics. The thesis interrogates how material and conceptual rigour function as epistemological tools that shape artistic inquiry. It also considers how artists navigate the ethical implications of material use, and how their practices intersect with broader ecological, social, and political concerns.

Significantly, the research reveals a shared emphasis among the artists on process-driven approaches that foreground interpolation, material intuition, and a rhizomatic model of creating and sharing work. These practices are contextualised within a Southern Hemisphere perspective, critically reflecting on questions of belonging, post-colonial legacies, and the relationship between local and global art networks. By tracing these interwoven concerns, this study positions contemporary sculpture as a site of critical and imaginative potential -

where artists reframe inherited narratives, question dominant systems of value, and expand the possibilities of what artistic practice can contribute to the world.

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Preface

This thesis transpires through an autoethnographic lens, a perspective I consciously acknowledge as both a guiding force and an inherent limitation. My approach is shaped by personal experience, artistic practice, and the cultural intersections that have informed my thinking. The artists and thematic threads explored here are entwined with my own creative inquiries and intellectual curiosities. While I will expand upon these in the introduction, it is important to first acknowledge the lens through which I see, the subjectivity that shapes my engagement, and the reflexivity that underpins this work.

For over twelve years, my artistic practice has focused on ceramics, alongside sculptural mediums, as well as printmaking, drawing, and photography. Across these varied disciplines I have sought to establish a conceptual and material lineage - one that interrogates the complex relationships between humans, behaviour, and the environment, drawing attention to the temporal and spatial scales we inhabit and influence. My work is inherently tactile, visceral, and intimate, drawing on natural, biographical, art historical, and anthropological references. It is as much a process of philosophical inquiry as it is of material experimentation. It is an instinctive negotiation between structured research and open-ended exploration. Throughout my career I have exhibited, undertaken residencies, and contributed to collaborative projects both nationally and internationally. Beyond material concerns my practice is also shaped by my geographic and cultural entanglements. I was born in Australia to New Zealand *pakehā*¹ parents and spent my childhood years in New Zealand before returning to Australia, where I have lived for the past eighteen years. Though I have applied for Australian citizenship twice, I remain a non-citizen, existing in a state of in-betweenness - a condition that has inevitably shaped my perceptions of belonging and national identity. I hold distinct yet overlapping understandings of these two places: the Australia of my birth,

¹ *Pākehā* (Māori): a New Zealander of European descent.

the New Zealand of my upbringing and ancestry, and the Australia in which I now live and work. These personal histories influence my engagement with artistic practice and research, particularly in considering how artists from the Southern Hemisphere navigate questions of identity, geography, and international artistic discourse.

One of the central aims of this research is to examine how contemporary artists in Australia and New Zealand - particularly those working with sculptural and material-based approaches - utilise their practices as methods of knowledge-building, engaging in both artistic and non-artistic dialogue. I examine how they articulate questions about history, materiality, and place through their work. As an artist, I feel a strong responsibility to foster curiosity and critical inquiry, both within and beyond artistic circles. I regard art and life as profoundly entwined, a perspective I also discern in the works and practices of the selected artists. This research is partly driven by a fundamental question: how can art contribute to the world beyond its formal or conceptual concerns? Can it serve as a tool for deeper engagement, and for reconfiguring the ways we understand and interact with the world? Through the course of this research, I found that some of these considerations were not as central to the selected artists as I had initially assumed. I recognise that I may have projected certain urgencies onto their work - urgencies shaped by my own artistic and intellectual preoccupations. However, this realisation does not diminish the significance of their practices but rather allows space for alternative readings and interpretations.

Initially, I had proposed a direct interview-based methodology, intending to engage in conversations with each artist. However, this approach did not fully materialize, and in some cases, my understanding of their work has been shaped primarily through secondary sources and personal encounters with their art. While this deviation from my original plan presented certain limitations, it also introduced a productive tension that mirrors the way many of these artists themselves work. Instead of direct dialogue, I found myself engaging with their

practices in a more interpretative and realistic manner, drawing connections, tracing conceptual echoes, and allowing for meaning to emerge in the gaps between things. The research process itself became an act of weaving disparate threads, navigating material and conceptual landscapes, and revealing the peripheral and nuanced ideas that reside within the work of these artists. This thesis is not only an academic investigation, but also a reflective and generative exercise that exists at the intersection of research and artistic practice, between personal history and collective inquiry. It is an attempt to both critically examine and creatively engage with the practices of my peers, to position myself within a broader artistic lineage, and to explore the ways in which we - as artists in the Southern Hemisphere - articulate our place in a global artistic conversation.

Introduction

What is the role of the contemporary artist today? What ethical and social responsibilities do artists bear; and how might they contribute beyond, or from within, the art world? These questions form the foundation of this research, guiding an inquiry into how six contemporary artists - Hany Armanious, Francis Carmody, Zac Langdon-Pole, Kate Newby, Francis Upritchard, and John Ward Knox - engage with material, form, concept, and context. Each artist works primarily within sculptural genres, occupying a space where material intelligence converges with conceptual enquiry. Though their approaches may differ, they share a commitment to conceptual and material rigour, as well as a sustained engagement with international contexts. Through the careful negotiation of material and form, they construct inquiries rather than conclusions, fostering layered and relational interpretations. Their practices astutely traverse both material and conceptual enquiry, with many works and exhibitions implicitly questioning global and local epistemologies. This thesis examines how these artists cultivate their practices, the systems of value they employ, and the ways in which broader social, cultural, and ecological concerns permeate their work.

As an artist, my own practice is often guided by a sense of antagonism, a deliberate resistance to passive output - questioning, probing, and destabilizing assumptions. At a time of individual conscientious enquiry into how art can contribute to issues beyond art (into ethical, political, social, ecological realms), this research was an opportunity to learn how my predecessors and peers approached these issues. How do they create work that still engages with art history and culture? What peripheral considerations do they attempting to imbue in their work? What value systems do they hold for their own work, and other artist's work? The research stemmed from initial readings into the linked approaches of socially engaged art and

antagonism, extending into theories of Relational Aesthetics² and Participation³. Relational Aesthetics expands the definition of art beyond material objects to encompass the human interactions and social contexts it generates. In this sense, it is strongly linked to post-materialism⁴, which suggests a shift in values from material security toward non-material priorities such as self-expression, environmental sustainability, and social justice, often emerging in more secure and affluent societies. Nicolas Bourriaud, who first theorised Relational Aesthetics, argues that art should be understood as a network of relationships rather than a self-contained entity, inviting dialogue and participation. He situates Relational Aesthetics within the lineage of avant-garde movements such as Fluxus and Situationism, emphasising its collectivist and anti-consumerist ethos. Drawing on Marxist theory⁵, Bourriaud frames relational art as operating in a liminal space - a “social interstice”⁶ - between aesthetics and politics, where new forms of engagement emerge. Rather than breaking from Modernism, Relational Aesthetics continues its legacy, positioning experimental artistic processes as a challenge to the commodification of culture, or what he terms the “culture industry”⁷. A key text that set part of the framework for the beginning of this research was Jason Miller’s ‘Activism vs. Antagonism: Socially Engaged Art from Bourriaud to Bishop and Beyond’. Miller contrasts Relational Aesthetics with relational antagonism, an alternative model proposed by Claire Bishop, which values disruption and conflict in art. While Relational Aesthetics aims to create social bonds and participatory experiences, critics (such as Bishop and Grant Kester) argue it lacks evaluative criteria,

² Nicholas Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics*. France: Les presses du réel, 2002.

³ Claire Bishop. “Participation.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66, no. 3 (2008): 309-11.

⁴ Ronald Inglehart. *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics*. 1 ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.

⁵ Marxism: A socio-economic and political framework based on Karl Marx’s (1818-83) critique of capitalism, viewing society as structured by class struggle, the extraction of value through labour, and the dominance of private property - especially in the exploitative dynamic between capitalists and proletarians.

⁶ Jason Miller. “Activism Vs. Antagonism: Socially Engaged Art from Bourriaud to Bishop and Beyond.” *Journal. Field*, no. 3, Winter 2016 (2016): 168.

⁷ Miller. “Activism Vs. Antagonism”, 168.

raising the question: what makes social interactions art? Miller suggests that both relational aesthetics and antagonistic art require ethical and aesthetic evaluation. A salient point from this text was from Chantal Mouffe's influential concept of political antagonism. Mouffe states "Critical art is art that foments dissent; that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate."⁸ Miller also iterates that variations of antagonism or social engagement can be found on a spectrum between fiercely antagonistic and gently ameliorative. In exploring these perspectives and strategies, I recognised a strong alignment with the concerns and values that underpin my own artistic practice. This recognition informed the development of a structured set of interview questions for the artists selected for this research (see Appendix). I initially anticipated uncovering explicit manifestations of antagonism or critical interrogation in each artist's work, yet what emerged was far more multifaceted. While some artists indeed engage in forms of disruption or critique, others approach their work through a more introspective lens - one that prioritises material intuition,⁹ embodied knowledge, and subtle interventions rather than overt antagonism. Several artists in this study exhibit a profound tacit awareness - an ability to work with material in a way that transcends technical proficiency, guided instead by instinct and sensitivity in their process. The artists' practices are curiosity-driven and often unfold in ways that resist rigid categorisation. This fluidity allows for a dynamic interplay between control and chance, precision and improvisation, the learned and the intuitive. These artists engage in a constant negotiation between material and meaning, shaping and being shaped by their chosen mediums. Another approach utilised by many of the artists mentioned and researched here is interpolation. While interpolation is a mathematical technique that uses two data points as anchors to estimate unknown values along their trajectory; in artistic interpolation,

⁸ Chantal Mouffe. "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces." *Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 1, 2, no. Summer 2007 (2007), 4.

⁹ Intuition in this context refers to instinctive, embodied knowledge that guides the making process, allowing artists to respond sensitively to material and form without relying on conscious reasoning.

artworks reference conceptual or aesthetic anchors, creating a web of interconnectedness. This process can manifest in various ways. Artists may bridge historical styles with contemporary forms, reinterpret cultural motifs, or synthesise disparate influences to generate new meaning. By interpolating between established references, these artists activate the space between visual language, physical materiality, and conceptual rigour. This method illustrates the quest to contribute to change or awareness beyond artistic concerns.

This research is shaped by my individual position as an artist. What I attempt to achieve in my own work correlates to what I seek to witness in the works of other artists. The experience of encountering a sculptural artwork is deeply embodied, often beginning with an instinctive, visceral response to materiality, scale, and surface. This initial impression - what captivates a viewer and sustains their attention - is what I first register when engaging with an artwork. Beyond this, I seek a more profound encounter with an artist's thought process, an engagement with their conceptual rigour and a sense of intelligence embedded within the work. No artwork exists in isolation. It is shaped by its context, environment, and the conditions under which it is experienced. In turn, no artist's practice is developed in a vacuum - it emerges from entangled systems of knowledge, informed by histories, geographies, and experiences. This thesis investigates how sculptural practice operates as both a material enquiry and a conceptual methodology; one that allows artists to make sense of, and respond to, the shifting world they inhabit.

The primary artists examined in this research sustain critically engaged practices that reflect diverse methodological frameworks. Their approaches span a spectrum - from formally structured and process-oriented to intuitively driven and personally embedded - each shaped by a distinctive relationship with material and contextual rigour.

Hany Armanious (born 1962, Ismailia, Egypt) is a Sydney-based artist whose practice is grounded in a tacit and “mystically esoteric”¹⁰ approach to making. When he emigrated to Australia at the age of six, he experienced a cultural shift that enabled him to encounter and examine the world anew, through both spoken language and daily objects. These two components of material and language remain steadfast in his sculptural practice, where he challenges the very notion of understanding the world through its objects, while unravelling the experience of encountering them anew. His creative journey began in his teenage years where he had a keen interest in both music and art. He first experimented with painting, reflecting that he started out making work that looked like Ian Fairweather¹¹. Reflecting on his early experiences in art school, he acknowledges that he “was too young and didn’t know enough.”¹² However, these formative years laid the groundwork for what would become an extensive and enduring career.

After completing his undergraduate formal education (BFA, City Art Institute, 1984; and later a Doctor of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, 2021), Armanious spent the next decade working from a warehouse studio, sharing the space with a group of artist friends. During this period, they lived frugally - bin-diving for food, on the dole and paying cheap rent - as they focused on creating and showing work in an attempt to garner recognition. His early practice centred around painting, but gradually objects began to make their way into the painting practice in what he describes as a “kind of collage aesthetic.”¹³ This organic transition led to a more sculptural practice, and painting evolved into

¹⁰ Hany Armanious. “From Nothing - Mimetic Seeing and Making.” Doctor of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, 2021, 6.

¹¹ Ian Fairweather (1891-1974): a peripatetic Scottish painter who lived and worked in Australia; his work bridged Eastern and Western cultures, demonstrating how art can transcend national borders, not dissimilar to Armanious’s own history.

¹² Hany Armanious. By Alana Wilson. 2024.

¹³ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

installations. “There wasn’t a moment where it became sculpture, it just evolved where it came off the wall,”¹⁴ he explains.

A pivotal discovery in his career was the process of casting, a technique that remains integral to his work. This process allows him to engage with ideas of mimesis, representation, and the innate act of perceptual experience. His practice is guided by tacit awareness, with the casting process serving as both method and muse. Despite his dedication, Armanious did not have his first solo exhibition until his early thirties. He is grateful for the delay, admitting “my early work garnered little interest... it was terrible.”¹⁵ However, perseverance paid off and his practice gained recognition both in Australia and internationally. He represented Australia at the 54th International Art Exhibition at the Venice Biennale (*The Golden Thread*, 2011). Other notable exhibitions include *Stone Soup*, at the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds (2024) and *Walls to Live Beside, Rooms to Own: The Chartwell Show* at Auckland Gallery Toi o Tāmaki (2022).

¹⁴ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

¹⁵ Armanious, “From Nothing”, 7.



Figure 1. Hany Armanious, *The Golden Thread*, Australian Pavilion, 54th Venice Biennale, 2011.



Figure 2. Hany Armanious, *Tabula Rasa*, 2022. Cast resin, aluminium, suede, marble, brass, 174 x 33 x 48cm.



Figure 3. Hany Armanious, *Stone Soup*, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, 2024.

With a career spanning decades, Armanious’s work continues to address a “set of persistent ideas around mimesis, representation, and replication.”¹⁶ His sculptural practice revolves around found objects and their facsimiles, creating a dialogue between what is perceived and what is real. By casting near-exact replicas of quotidian objects - tabletops, paint trays, pinboards - he exploits and subverts the viewers instinct to identify and interpret them. “The development of studio work is never a clearly demarcated process of thinking and planning followed by action and realisation,”¹⁷ he explains. “It is an attempt to set aside aspiration and exertion in favour of attending to whatever objects might be in front of me.”¹⁸ This tacit approach fosters what he terms “creative labour,”¹⁹ a process that is more visceral

¹⁶ Armanious, “From Nothing”, 1.

¹⁷ Armanious, “From Nothing”, 5.

¹⁸ Armanious, “From Nothing”, 7.

¹⁹ Armanious, “From Nothing”, 7.

than intellectual. He states, “the work that is carried out in my studio often sits outside discursive experience and demands a tacit awareness.”²⁰



Figure 4. Hany Armanious, *Channels*, 2024. Pigmented polyurethane resin, gouache, 19 x 66 x 47.5cm.

The commonplace is illuminated through what Armanious calls the “mimetic manoeuvre”²¹, a technique that challenges preconceived perceptions and reconfigures how viewers engage with objects. These perceptions - embedded in one’s own personal object-understandings - are at odds with what Armanious presents, skewing inherited epistemologies and cracking open the viewer’s reflections on what is in front of them. He elaborates, “I address mimetic representation and replication to clarify the complex relationship between formal philosophical thought and the operations of creative labour.”²² This intricate dance of *trompe-loeil* between representation and understanding is central to his work, inviting audiences to question their assumptions about not only the objects they see, but how they

²⁰ Armanious, “From Nothing”, 10.

²¹ Armanious, “From Nothing”, 8.

²² Armanious, “From Nothing”, 1.

look at everything. His works are not driven by homage or nostalgia, but to elucidate what is found between the work (the thing) and what we perceive the work to be (the image).



Figure 5. Hany Armanious, *Mumble*, 2023. Pigmented polyurethane resin, gouache, 6 x 8 x 7.7cm.

Armanious’s artistic philosophy is anchored in an awareness of the quotidian, yet he does not believe in a strict cosmic order or belief system underpinning his work. “There is no commonplace, there is no ordinary. Everything’s extraordinary, and everything is part of this incredible luminosity that we live in,”²³ he asserts. His work does not challenge ideas overtly but instead offers “a different kind of platform to apprehend the world, just another way of looking.”²⁴ His understanding of the creative act further illustrates his distinctive approach. “It’s internal. Labour is labour, and labour is drudgery and work. But the creative act - it’s not something that happens out here. It’s all happening inside. It’s some form of epiphany and knowing - that’s creative labour. It’s an encounter and a recognition.”²⁵ This internal

²³ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

²⁴ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

²⁵ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

exploration fuels his practice, and yet he has no expectations for how his audience should engage with his work. “You’ve got to let it go. The more you do it the more you know that it’s out of your hands...you cannot change how people look at stuff.”²⁶ Despite the inherent challenges and uncertainties of artistic practice, Armanious remains unwaveringly optimistic. “A thousand percent optimistic,”²⁷ he says of his outlook on the world. While he does not see his work as antagonistic, he embraces the articulated dilemmas present in art, recognising them as essential to the creative discourse.

Armanious has been selected for this research due to the distinct and enduring qualities of his practice. His work occupies a niche position within contemporary sculpture, exemplifying rigorous process, conceptual opacity, and a rare balance between precision and ambiguity. Through his meticulous casting techniques and subtle transformations of everyday objects, he invites viewers to reconsider the relationship between object and meaning, revealing the extraordinary within the ordinary. His practice aligns closely with the concerns of this thesis - particularly material rigour, tacit knowledge, and process-led inquiry - while his international exhibition history and relevance within both Australasian and global contexts underscore the transnational dimension of his work. Unwavering in his commitment to his own intentions, Armanious sustains a practice that is both idiosyncratic and globally resonant, making his inclusion in this study relevant and generative.

Francis Carmody (born 1998, Gadigal Country/Sydney) is a Melbourne-based artist whose practice examines natural phenomena, technological processes, and speculative histories. Through installation and material experimentation he explores the intersections of ecological systems and human intervention. He has a great interest in prehistory, natural

²⁶ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

²⁷ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

science, and a broader sense of “looking at where we’ve been and where we’re going”²⁸. Each project becomes a form of story to flesh out a different aspect of his research, synthesising scientific enquiry, organic matter, and technology. He speaks of his practice as a useful conduit to explore core personal curiosities and interests. His work often considers the evolving relationship between organic matter and technological advancement, integrating scientific and conceptual research into dynamic sculptural forms. Carmody holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting from the Victorian College of the Arts (2017-19), and a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Hons) from Goldsmiths, University of London (2018-19). Carmody’s work has been shown across institutional and independent spaces, with notable exhibitions including *The Charge That Binds* (2024), *Signal Detection* (2024), *Laschamp Cycles* (2023), and *Exposure Site* (2022), the latter marking his selection as a Studio Artist at Gertrude Contemporary (2022-2024). He has received several awards, including the Keith and Elizabeth Murdoch Travelling Fellowship (2023) and the Melbourne University Global Scholars Award (2018).

²⁸ “Francis Carmody.” 2025, <https://www.franciscarmody.com>.



Figure 6. Francis Carmody. *Signal Detection*, Mejia Gallery, Melbourne, 2023.

Carmody describes his approach as iterative and research driven. His practice often investigates the relationship between appetite and decay, engaging with cycles of consumption and collapse. The narrative framework of his exhibitions provides an opportunity to construct and unravel ideas through material and spatial storytelling. He highlights the importance of both material and conceptual rigor, advocating for a commitment to material integrity, allowing substances to speak through their own physicality and temporality. He sees objects as active agents, acknowledging that even synthetic materials carry their own power: “It’s all natural in a strange way.”²⁹

²⁹ Francis Carmody. By Alana Wilson. 2024.



Figure 7. Francis Carmody, *Laschamp Cycles: Aurora's I & II*, 2024. Installation view, *The Charge That Binds*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne.

Beyond organic materials, Carmody's research extends into advanced fabrication techniques, including 3D printing and CNC machining³⁰. He studied these technologies at MIT's summer school, working alongside aerospace and military engineers to explore their applications beyond conventional industrial and medical uses. While he acknowledges the potential of such technologies, he remains cautious; "conceptually, I find 3D printing quite dangerous and difficult. Just because it can be done doesn't necessarily mean it's the most interesting."³¹ Instead, he is drawn to the potential of scale manipulation, pushing processes beyond their expected applications through collaborations with engineers and fabricators. He relishes the creative tension that arises when technical limitations intersect with artistic intuition, allowing constraints to become generative forces in his work. He values these

³⁰ CNC (Computer Numerical Control) machining is a manufacturing process where pre-programmed computer software controls the movement of industrial tools and machinery to create desired 3D parts.

³¹ Carmody. By Alana Wilson.

exchanges for their ability to expand his practice, stating, “I like working with people outside of art, because I learn a lot, and because they approach problem-solving differently.”³²



Figure 8. Francis Carmody, *The Organs of a Homing Pigeon Eating Spinning Seeds and Heading North*, 2023.



Figure 9. Francis Carmody, *A Relic Remains*, 2023. Installation detail, Gertrude Glasshouse.

³² Carmody. By Alana Wilson.

Carmody is included in this research because of the distinct conceptual and material balance that defines his practice. His work is underpinned by an inquisitive drive that fuels rigorous research and an expansive approach to form and meaning. His sculptures function as vessels for speculation, reflecting on what has been and what is yet to come. Having worked with Carmody prior to undertaking this study, I witnessed firsthand the level of forethought, critical enquiry, and contextual sensitivity that shapes each of his projects. His practice is characterised by a relational flow of ideas, moving fluidly between disciplines such as science, environmental theory and art history. He integrates these curiosities into his artistic methodology, allowing external knowledge systems to inform and expand the scope of his work. This interdisciplinary agility, combined with a commitment to material rigour, positions Carmody as a key figure within this research - an artist whose process exemplifies the interconnected thinking and speculative approach central to contemporary sculptural practice.

Zac Langdon-Pole (born 1988, *Tāmaki Makaurau*/Auckland) is an artist whose practice exists at the confluence of material histories, cultural taxonomies, and poetic speculation. His work interrogates how knowledge is constructed and transmitted, bringing together found and fabricated materials to reveal the entangled relationships between natural history, colonial legacies, and systems of meaning. This inter-disciplinary approach often takes the form of assemblages and installations, forming constellations of inquiry and speculation. Langdon-Pole completed his Bachelor of Fine Arts at Elam School of Fine Arts in 2010 before pursuing postgraduate studies at the Städelschule in Frankfurt. There, he became part of a generation of New Zealand artists (including Simon Denny and Luke Willis Thompson) who have expanded their practices through European art institutions and embedded themselves in international artistic discourse. Previously based in Berlin and now based in Auckland, Langdon-Pole's work continues to evolve through cross-cultural research

and global engagement, often challenging historical assumptions and inherited knowledge systems. His work frequently engages with the way objects and narratives accumulate and shift in meaning over time and within various contexts.



Figure 10. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Memory Garden*, 2025. Installation view, Asia Pacific Triennial 11, QAGOMA, Brisbane.

His research-driven practice employs methodologies akin to constellations, interpolation, mapping, and migratory travel. Awarded the BMW Art Journey Prize in 2018, he embarked on a five-month global expedition following migratory bird paths and celestial navigation routes, examining how different cultures have interpreted the night sky as a foundational system of meaning-making. During this journey he encountered ‘averted vision’, an astronomical technique where looking slightly away from a faint object enhances its visibility. This technique became a metaphor for how the periphery shapes the centre, revealing that what one fixates on is always in dialogue with what lies just beyond sight. His practice further operates through interpolation - a process of assembling and reconfiguring existing materials into unexpected juxtapositions (meteorite fragments, literary translations,

furniture, mollusc shells, and historical photographs) - creating unsettling communions that reveal their layered histories. This duality is a thread that runs throughout his work, where the vast and the intimate, the historical and the contemporary, are held in careful equilibrium.



Figure 11. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Possible Echoes*, 2023. Meteorite dust, magnets, fossilised whale ear-bone, cast iron cobbler's shoe anvil, sand, knife. Dimensions unknown.

Langdon-Pole's work frequently examines colonial legacies in language and objects, revealing how cultural memory, scientific classification, and power structures intersect. He explores New Zealand's national identity while reshaping perceptions of its artists through a critical and intelligent practice. He exposes distortions and omissions in accepted histories by questioning the stability of knowledge. His engagement with celestial mapping as a foundation for meaning-making reflects a broader inquiry into how societies have historically oriented themselves. Through themes of migration, displacement, and interconnected histories, his work challenges misconceptions and exoticized narratives, urging a re-evaluation of our place and cultural inheritance.



Figure 12. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Frog A (detail)*, 2023. Recombined jigsaw puzzles of: Carina Nebula (2010), NASA, ESA, Mario Livio (STScI), Hubble 20th Anniversary Team (STScI); *The Assuaging of the Waters* (1840), John Martin; 150.5 x 196.8 x 4.0 cm.

Language plays a critical role in his investigations. He frequently engages with nomenclature as a conceptual device, prompting audiences to drift through etymological slippages and semantic ambiguities. Just as a word may shift in meaning over centuries, an object may accrue new associations through its movement across time and place. Langdon-Pole's assemblages' function in a similar manner, bringing together disparate elements to form conceptual constellations that are open-ended and ever-shifting.



Figure 13. Zac Langdon-Pole, *A Quiver of Names*, 2022. Wooden specimen cabinet drawers, Blickensderfer, Royal, and Underwood typewriters, keys replaced with mixed ancient arrowheads: Neolithic (c. 7000 - 1700 BCE); Ancient Greek (c. 1200 BCE - 600 AD); Roman (c. 753 BC - 1453 AD); Ottoman (c. 1400 - 1600 AD), 155 x 48.5 x 42.5cm.

Langdon-Pole's practice has been widely recognised, with solo exhibitions such as *Containing Multitudes* (City Gallery Wellington, 2020) and participation in *Sculpture on the Gulf*, Waiheke Island (2024), and the *11th Asia Pacific Triennial* at QAGOMA, Brisbane (2024). He was awarded the Ars Viva Prize (2017), and the BMW Art Journey (2018), which facilitated his research-driven global exploration. He has also undertaken residencies at the McCahon House in Titirangi (2022), further deepening his engagement with the cultural and environmental narratives that shape Aotearoa.



Figure 14. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Chimera*, 2024. Sculpture on the Gulf, Waiheke Island, New Zealand.

Langdon-Pole's approach to artmaking is a process of testing, shifting, and reconfiguring. There is an inherent openness in his practice - an invitation for the viewer to engage in their own acts of interpolation, assembling meaning from fragments or within voids. Langdon-Pole cultivates an ethos - a way of being in and responding to the world. In

an era where knowledge has become increasingly fragmented, his practice seeks out new ways of forging connections and creating kinship across materials and histories. One encounters moments of recognition, slippage, and cognitive dissonance in his work. He is included in this research due to the prolific and erudite nature of his practice, sustaining international engagement whilst still being based in New Zealand - an inspiring trajectory for all New Zealand artists.

Kate Newby (born 1979, *Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland*) is a US-based New Zealand artist whose work thrives in the in-between spaces. Newby consistently activates the peripheral spaces within a gallery or environment, often activating interior edges or exterior sightlines. She has hung bells in stairwells and windchimes in front of windows, catching light and wind as it flows through a space from outside. She has filled cracks and voids with hand-made rocks, whilst leaving other spaces or entire rooms empty. She has created large installations made up of small components, and often seeks to create work outside of the expected barriers of a gallery, or of art. Such works draw the viewer's gaze outwards, beyond, further away from art and closer towards daily, lived experiences. "It's never been to my advantage to have a 'cleared out space', which most galleries and museums provide. My work thrives off real-time conversations with other stuff and things and people and bustle,"³³ she says. The kinds of spaces she is interested in engaging with in her work all tend to have varying degrees of privacy and openness. There are small details which may change throughout the day or with the weather. Her work feels a certain liveliness in spaces with more open, fluid, and personable components. Like moss growing in cracks, or dew droplets accumulating over time, her work appears slowly, exists casually, and is sometimes barely noticeable.

³³ Kate Newby. "Casualness: It's Not About What It Looks Like It's About What It Does." Doctorate, The University of Auckland, 2015, 66-67.



Figure 15. Kate Newby, *The more I listen to it the more I love it*, 2017. Glass, beer bottles, dimensions variable. Exhibition detail, Swedish Contemporary Art Foundation, Stockholm, Sweden.

Newby describes her practice as “site-specific projects that form relationships with locations through actions. Projects draw directly from the situations in which they are presented.”³⁴ Her work explores themes of “being in the world, addressing the everyday, the role of the travelling artist, the artwork as object, and casualness.”³⁵ Though she draws from disciplines such as architecture and interior design, she applies them “as only an artist would.”³⁶ This implies the removal of function, instead foregrounding a non-hierarchical approach to forms and materials. Her artistic ethos embraces openness and fluidity; she intends her artworks to “come across as open and casual gestures,”³⁷ allowing for a dynamic interaction between materiality, context, and the viewer’s experience. She characterises her approach as conversational and unmonumental, embracing the transient and ephemeral nature

³⁴ Newby, “Casualness”, iii.

³⁵ Newby, “Casualness”, iii.

³⁶ Newby, “Casualness”, iii.

³⁷ Newby, “Casualness”, iii.

of moments in time. In allowing her work to reveal itself gradually, the viewer is offered a contemplative and evolving experience. This resistance to instant comprehension ties into a broader inquiry in contemporary art, including many of the artists included in this research. Newby contemplates how to sustain a practice that remains dynamic and responsive to the unfolding moments of daily life while still preserving its ephemeral, unmonumental essence.



Figure 16. Kate Newby, *I can't nail the days down*, 2018. Exhibition detail, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria.

Newby's sensitivity to place aligns with her personal reverence of Land Art, yet her interventions resist monumentality. "I don't often make stand-alone sculpture. It always has this reliance on things bigger than itself,"³⁸ she shares. Instead of marking the landscape with grand gestures, she embeds works within it, attuned to the material and ephemeral conditions of a site. Newby's characteristic forms - tiles, wind chimes, puddles - are made from earthen

³⁸ Jessica-Belle Greer. "Inside Contemporary Artist Kate Newby's Creative Family Home in Te Henga." *Woman for Aotearoa*, 2021.

materials such as clay, glass, and rope. Her works respond to site and engage in an insistent dialogue with their surroundings.



Figure 17. Kate Newby, *The January February March*, 2015. Porcelain stoneware, earthenware, dimensions variable. Installation view, Hobart and Margaretville, The Catskills, NY.

Place and situation serve as fundamental aspects of her work. She speaks of growing up in New Zealand to artist-potter parents, navigating natural or crafted environments in a curious manner. She recalls: “we had a wood kiln on the property, where the whole valley would come and fire pots.”³⁹ Raised on Auckland’s west coast, between bush and coastline, she studied at Elam School of Fine Arts, valuing the slow, intuitive development of ideas, free from the pressures of the global art world. Her early career unfolded in artist-run spaces like Gambia Castle, where affordable rent fostered experimentation. “There was a kind of

³⁹ Greer. “Inside Contemporary Artist Kate Newby’s Creative Family Home in Te Henga.”

productive competition; everyone made each other better.”⁴⁰ She never deliberately set out to be an artist, she simply kept going. Sharing her thoughts on the personal stance she holds as an artist from New Zealand, echoes of her casual approach and desire to illuminate the marginal or peripheral ring true. She recalls New Zealand’s art community as one of entanglement and exchange. In 2012 she was awarded the prestigious Walter’s Prize, including a grant of \$50,000 to travel to New York to exhibit her entry work *Crawl out your window* (fig. 18) at Saatchi & Saatchi. Without intending to leave New Zealand, she remained in New York for the next decade. Here, her practice was shaped by physical constraints - lugging heavy ceramics home on the subway, her materials often weighing more than her own body. Now based in rural South Texas, Newby is immersed in its stark landscape and the rhythms of its ranching community. The isolation and extreme climate present challenges, yet she is drawn to the possibilities the land offers. With the vastness around her, she has the space to push her work toward a deeper engagement with site, moving closer to Land Art and the phenomenological presence of materials in the environment.

⁴⁰ Ross Simonini. “An Interview with Kate Newby.” *ArtReview*, January - February 2019 (2019): 36-41.



Figure 18. Kate Newby, *Crawl out of your window*, 2010. Concrete ramp, rocks, crystals, cotton fabric wall, yellow paint. Installation view, GAK Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst, Bremen.



Figure 19. Kate Newby, *Let me be the wind that pulls your hair*, 2017. Ceramic, wire, rope, dimensions variable. Installation view, Artspace, San Antonio, Texas, USA.

The artist embraces an aesthetic she describes as “wilfully un-monumental.”⁴¹ She intentionally “shed[s] obligations to the categorisations of art history,”⁴² resisting traditional classifications in favour of a practice that values temporality and process. She prioritises immediate engagement, preferring factors such as weather, erosion, and human engagement to leave their traces. She aligns herself with artists who share a “conversational, direct and at times even corroded relationship to the current art context as a way of forming a more personal engagement with the inevitable processes of historicising that art history provides, and the escalation the art market demands.”⁴³ Newby finds inspiration in the incidental and the overlooked - what could be referred to as rejectamenta. Her material vocabulary of clay, glass, bronze, and rope is intentionally local and minimally processed. She says, “something that I always hope for my work is that it has the characteristics of feeling assertive with space rather than passive.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ Newby, “Casualness”, 11.

⁴² Newby, “Casualness”, 11.

⁴³ Newby, “Casualness”, 12.

⁴⁴ Jennifer Teets. “Kate Newby.” France, 2022. <https://www.galerieartconcept.com/en/kate-newby-try-doing-anything-without-it/>.



Figure 20. Kate Newby, *Had us running with you*, 2023. Ceramic, glass. Installation view, Michael Lett, Auckland.

Newby has been selected for this research due to the tactile yet ephemeral nature of her practice, with installations that are contingent on site, weather, time, and human

interaction. This responsiveness to context, and her use of modest, often fragile materials, reflect a deep engagement with the everyday and the peripheral, aligning her work with core concerns of this thesis. Newby is currently one of the most prominent sculptural artists from New Zealand operating on the global stage. Despite the apparent subtlety or impermanence of her work, her practice commands critical attention. These qualities make her practice not only highly relevant to the theoretical concerns of this research but also illustrative of the broader shifts in contemporary sculpture toward transience, contingency, and site-responsive making.

Francis Upritchard (born 1976, *Ngāmotu*/New Plymouth) is a London-based artist whose practice traverses the intersections of sculpture, craft, anthropology, and museology. Her work blends influence from historical artifacts, mythological narratives, and futuristic imaginings. Emphasising both intuition and chance in her process, she balances meticulous craftsmanship with improvisation. Upritchard critically engages with how viewers interpret the past to shape visions of the future, exposing the gaps, mis-readings, and contradictions in historical narratives. Her imagined worlds offer an open-ended, non-dominant view of history and culture. Upritchard studied fine art at Ilam School of Fine Arts in Christchurch from 1994 to 1997. Initially focused on painting, she quickly transitioned to sculpture, recognising the spatial and material possibilities of the medium. After graduating, she relocated to London in 1998, opting to develop her idiosyncratic approach outside formal postgraduate studies. Shortly after arriving in London, Upritchard co-founded the artist-run space Bart Wells Institute with the painter Luke Gottelier, an initiative that fostered her interest in installation and collective exhibition-making. Her work initially explored kinetic sculptures and interactive installations, such as corridors of itchy jumpers. However, in the late 1990s, she shifted towards figurative sculpture, initially making mummified figures wrapped in found textiles before expanding her material vocabulary to include polymer clay, ceramics, bronze, glass, textiles, and balata (a natural rubber sourced from Brazil). This turn towards figuration

was influenced by her early encounters with historical objects in London museums and has since remained a key thread in her practice.



Figure 21. Francis Upritchard, *Traveller's Collection*, 2003. Mixed media, 91 x 153 x 61 cm.

A significant early milestone in her career was winning New Zealand's Walters Prize in 2006, which cemented her international reputation. She represented New Zealand at the Venice Biennale in 2009 alongside Judy Millar and was included in the central international exhibition, *Viva Arte Viva*, at the Venice Biennale in 2017. Significant solo exhibitions include *Any Noise Annoys an Oyster* at Kunsthall Charlottenburg, Copenhagen, Denmark (2024); *Wetwang Slack* at The Curve, Barbican Centre, London, UK (2022); *Paper, Creature, Stone* at Christchurch Art Gallery, New Zealand (2022). In 2022 she was commissioned to create *Here Comes Everybody* (fig.25) for the Art Gallery of New South Wales forecourt.



Figure 22. Francis Upritchard, *Save Yourself*, 2009. Installation view, New Zealand pavilion, 53rd Venice Biennale.

Upritchard’s sculptural process is entrenched in embodied knowledge - an intuitive, physical relationship with materials and making. She sculpts from memory rather than from direct observation, embracing distortion: “I try and embrace how incorrect memory can be.”⁴⁵ Her figures are neither portraits nor true representations but rather hybrid forms that blur the boundaries between past and future, human and non-human. She describes them as “husks or

⁴⁵ Astrid Agnes Hald. “Artist Francis Upritchard: I Can’t Help the Whole World Heal.” Louisiana Channel, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 2024.

costumes,”⁴⁶ archaic yet futuristic, inviting viewers to question their assumptions about history and cultural authenticity. This scepticism toward historical certainty underpins much of her work. She acknowledges the slippery politics inherent in cultural references, stating, “I really try not to be specific because I don’t want to represent anyone. And I don’t think art is for that.”⁴⁷ This extends to her installation strategies, where she intentionally disrupts museological conventions, using atypical plinths and vitrines to challenge the hierarchical presentation of art and artifacts. Often evoking *wunderkammer* (cabinets of curiosity) or domestic settings, her groupings of crafted objects interrogate conserved histories or suggest new narratives, poking at how objects and artifacts shape one’s understanding of the world.



Figure 23. Francis Upritchard, *Any Noise Annoys an Oyster*, 2024-2025. Installation view, Kunsthall Charlottenberg.

⁴⁶ Hald. “Artist Francis Upritchard: I Can’t Help the Whole World Heal.”

⁴⁷ Ben Luke. “Francis Upritchard: The Confessions of a Magpie Kiwi.” *The Art Newspaper*, no. 4 October (2018).



Figure 24. Francis Upritchard, *Echo*, 2011. Installation view, Kate MacGarry, London.

Materiality plays a central role in Upritchard's work, shaping both her process and the meaning of her sculptures. The artist's personal history subtly informs her approach to material and form. She grew up in New Plymouth in what she describes as an environment of both self-sufficiency and contradiction: "We grew all our own vegetables, and all our friends were weavers and potters and things like that. But then my dad was an agricultural scientist making pesticides."⁴⁸ This interplay between craft traditions and industrial processes is reflected in her material choices, which range from ancient techniques to modern synthetic compounds. Upritchard acknowledges that the speed and physicality of working in each medium significantly impacts the outcome, often speaking of 'fast materials' and 'slow materials'. While she has produced significant large-scale commissions such as *Here Comes Everybody* (2022) (fig.25), she insists that her smaller works hold equal weight, subverting traditional expectations of sculptural significance. Smaller works, made with polymer clay

⁴⁸ Luke. "Francis Upritchard: The Confessions of a Magpie Kiwi."

and textiles, allow for quick, instinctive gestures, while larger works, such as her balata or bronze sculptures, require extensive collaboration. “Working with the rubber is certainly a chaotic process. It’s so fast, and you cannot control things.”⁴⁹ Larger works necessitate working with a team, which shifts her role from sole maker to an orchestrator of a collaborative process.



Figure 25. Francis Upritchard, *Here Comes Everybody*, 2022. Cast bronze with patina.

Upritchard’s work sits at the intersection of material experimentation, speculative anthropology, and contemporary sculpture. Her figures - alien yet familiar, delicate yet robust - invite us to reconsider our perceptions of time, history and embodiment. Whether working in balata, bronze, or textiles, she embraces both precision and unpredictability, allowing material agency to shape her forms. Her installations disrupt the conventions of museum display, while her sculptural practice continues to evolve through a curiosity for new materials and collaborative processes. By interrogating historical narratives and embracing the fallibility of memory, she offers a sculptural language that is both deeply personal and universally resonant. Upritchard was selected for this research due to the strength and integrity of her internationally recognised practice as a New Zealand artist. She has remained

⁴⁹ Anthony Byrt. “Francis Upritchard: City Gallery Wellington.” *Artforum International* 55, no. 3 (2016), 303.

committed to handmade processes across a range of mediums, even as her work has scaled up. Her practice embodies a relational ethos, connecting histories and narratives in ways that reflect a holistic view of art and life.



Figure 26. Francis Upritchard, *Paper, Creature, Stone*, 2022. Installation view, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū.

John Ward Knox (born 1984, *Tāmaki Makaurau*/Auckland) is an Otago-based artist whose practice is grounded in material enquiry, sensitivity, and curiosity. There is a material exploration that drives his practice - its qualities, its thresholds, and its capacity to lead the making process - resulting in work that embraces levity in both a literal and conceptual sense. He has always been interested in “processes and craft and the skills it takes to make things.”⁵⁰ He works with materials such as timber, silk, ink, and metal, eliciting manifold meaning through material musings. Through a commitment to restraint and grace, his practice resists

⁵⁰ Ashley Smyth. “Artist Immersing Himself in 'Intricacies' of New Process.” *Waitaki App* (Waitaki), 2025.

excess, favouring subtle interventions that allow for quiet revelations through sensory perceptions.



Figure 27. John Ward Knox, *No title (ii)*, 2025. Macrocarpa, 30 x 235 x 59cm. Exhibition view, *Old growth*, Robert Heald Gallery, Wellington.

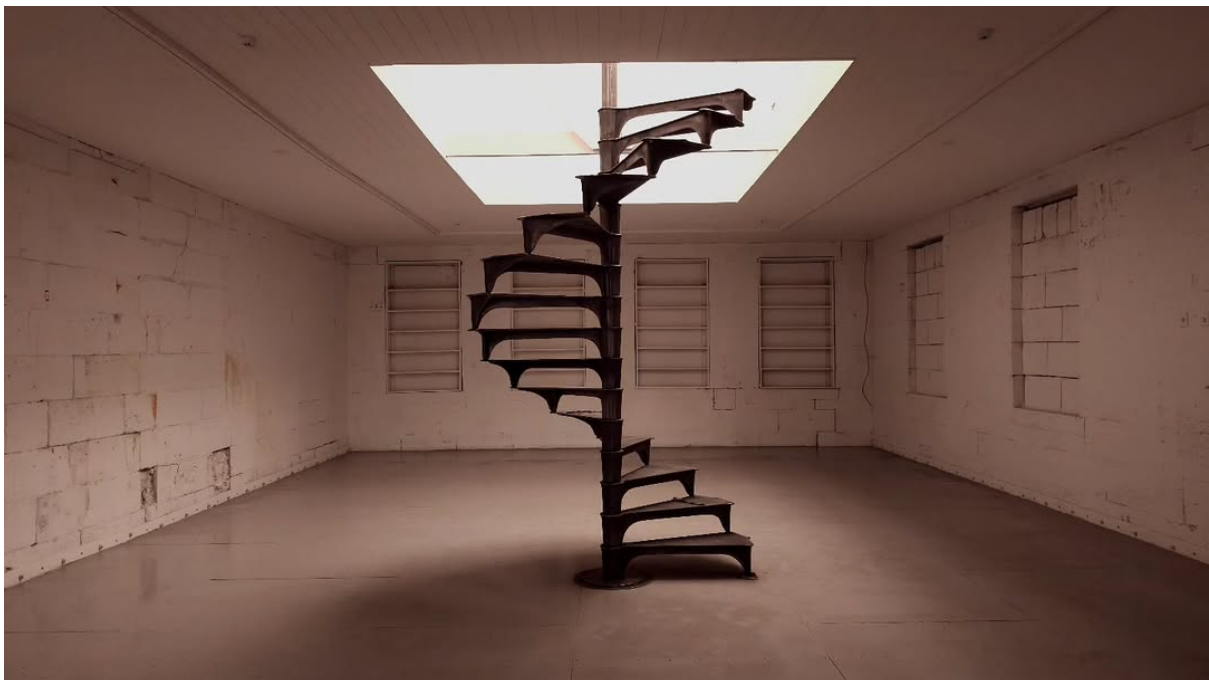


Figure 28. John Ward Knox, *Weight and Weighting, Light and Lightening*, 2025. Sand-cast iron, 300 x 190 x 190cm. Installation view, Crucible Artist Residency, Oamaru.

Ward Knox's relationship with making began in early childhood, a formative experience that continues to shape his approach to art. Reflecting on these origins, he recalls,

I started making as a very young child. Not art, just things. I was maybe three years old. I remember making a hammer out of cardboard, Sellotape, and a bottle cap. I showed it to my parents who were amazed. So I went away and made another, but the next one I phoned in a little so it was not as good and did not receive the same reaction. I think from this moment I became prolific, interested in change over repetition. I still make things. Often, capital A art, but also sometimes just things, that use the same skills and the same ideas, but their end context is not a gallery but a garage, a kitchen, or a drawer.⁵¹

A continuous drive to make (both as an artistic endeavour and an everyday impulse) permeates his practice, underscoring a fundamental engagement with material and process. He continues to make tools to work with, often as a starting point with each new body of work. Driven by an awareness of the poetic and philosophical weight that materials carry, he says "if I were forced to put my practice into overarching themes or questions, I would defer to the richness of language - to levity, to grace, to material sensitivity, to restraint, and to the soft human hurting that is the inescapable cost of life."⁵² This sensitivity is reflected in his artistic choices, which frequently involve minimal yet sensuously resonant gestures. Whether working with delicate pencil drawings, large-scale installations, or sculptural interventions, Ward Knox approaches each material with an intuitive sense of its limits and possibilities. He is less concerned with ascribing significance onto an artwork and more interested in allowing the material to guide his encounter.

⁵¹ John Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson. 2024.

⁵² Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.



Figure 29. John Ward Knox, *Hammer*, 2025. Oak, steel, 35 x 6 x 5cm.



Figure 30. John Ward Knox, *Hardly Held Lightly*, 2015. Steel chain, dimensions unknown. Commissioned by Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

Another alumnus of Elam, he completed his Master of Fine Arts in 2008 and has since exhibited widely across New Zealand and internationally. Notable solo exhibitions include *tellings* at Robert Heald Gallery (Wellington, 2023) and *old words* at Ivan Anthony

(Auckland, 2022). His work has also been included in significant group exhibitions such as *Walls to Live Beside, Rooms to Own: The Chartwell Show* at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki (2022), alongside Armanious and Newby. In 2020, his work *Jacinda* (fig.31) was a finalist for the Archibald Prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. The portrait of former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern sought to portray her as “somebody committed to a really tough and unrewarding job, who has managed to stay grounded despite the whirlwind of domestic and international politics.”⁵³ His contributions to the arts in New Zealand were recognized in 2015 when he was awarded the prestigious Frances Hodgkins Fellowship at the University of Otago. He has remained in Otago since, noting the space, easy access to natural environments, and the lesser economic pressures of making work in a city like Dunedin. His works are now held in major public collections, including the Chartwell Collection at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki and the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth.

⁵³ “Archibald - Past Works and Winners.” edited by Art Gallery of NSW, Art Gallery of NSW, 2020.



Figure 31. John Ward Knox, *Jacinda*, 2020. Oil on silk, 101 x 101 cm.

Ward Knox remains committed to “pursuing a path that appears simple and true to myself.”⁵⁴ He achieves this through a consistently sensitive material engagement and a selective, varied approach to making, rather than through prolific production. He shares:

I hope that my art presents a view of the world with human qualities of foresight, subtlety, and kind, slow temperament that are not the qualities of the age that we live through but are qualities that will be recognised as necessary the further into this hellish oppositional landscape we delve. I hope that by maintaining these qualities, the world will show itself against them and thus become naked to the truth of itself.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.

⁵⁵ Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.

During our conversations for this research, he shared the importance of maintaining non-artistic ways of working and living - of maintaining a garden, of building and repairing things, and of recalibrating oneself alongside the act of creating art. His practice has developed through shifting engagements with both commercial and conceptual work, with an ongoing aim to maintain a considered balance between the two. Ward Knox cultivates a space for contemplation through a practice defined by material attunement and conceptual restraint. His works are not declarations but offerings that invite attentive presence.

The inclusion of Ward Knox's practice offers a distinctly nuanced perspective on contemporary New Zealand art. Subtle and poetic, his work is marked by a quiet attentiveness to atmosphere, unfolding through interventions that encourage an embodied experience. His practice remains deeply rooted in place and process, embodying a symbiotic relationship between material, environment, and thought. As the only South Island-based artist in this study, his work introduces a pluralistic and regionally grounded viewpoint, characterised by a commitment to polyvalence - holding space for multiple meanings, temporalities, and modes of attention.

With the selected artists introduced, 'Chapter One: National Identities' expands to consider the national identities of Australia and New Zealand, examining how these artists position themselves within inherited cultural narratives. All six artists are based in, or connected to, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand - two nations marked by shared colonial entanglements and distinct artistic ecosystems. Their geographical positioning, on the periphery of dominant global art centres, raises questions around how artists negotiate both local belonging and international engagement. The works examined in this study are often shaped by an acute awareness of land, history, and cultural narratives. Rather than creating work that is explicitly site-specific or overtly national in scope, these artists engage in a more nuanced dialogue with place, considering how their identities, experiences, and movements

inform their practices. Beyond questions of identity and geography, this section also examines the broader responsibilities of the contemporary artist, exploring their core concerns, underlying value systems, and the strategies they employ to sustain internationally engaged practices. The artists in this study do not position themselves as activists, yet their work remains attuned to the complexities of the world they inhabit. Some engage with the environmental ramifications of materials whilst others interrogate the colonial histories embedded within objects. Their works invite sustained contemplation, prompting audiences to reconsider their own positions within these larger systems.

‘Chapter Two: Approaches and Methodologies’ maps artistic approaches, methodologies, and underlying conceptual frameworks of the selected artists. Their practices adopt strategies grounded in interpolation and relational thinking - approaches that favour layered, networked modes of meaning-making. They each prioritise a sustained research imperative: a commitment to interrogating dominant narratives or illuminating the interconnectivity of history, culture, temporality, and the human condition. Many artists embrace interpolation as both an assemblage technique and a conceptual device; combining fragments, materials, and references that encourage active navigation and interpretation.

‘Chapter Three: Site and Assemblage’ examines site and assemblage, positioning these practices within the lineage of Installation art and Relational Aesthetics. It draws on theories of activated spectatorship and viewer conditioning to explore how sculptural practice operates as a corporeal experience. Through critical analysis, the exhibition is examined as a field of encounter, where bodies, materials, and ideas are activated in space.

‘Chapter Four: Materials and Processes’ offers a sustained inquiry into material rigour and the making processes that underpin each artist’s practice. It foregrounds how tacit awareness and embodied knowledge manifests through making and draws on theoretical frameworks such as New Materialism to articulate the agency and vitality of materials. The

artists operate through an ongoing process of searching, collecting, and reconfiguring, allowing meaning to emerge organically through making. Across diverse methods of casting, carving, glassblowing, fabrication, ceramics, and 3D printing, the artists demonstrate deep material knowledge and process-led inquiry. Some pursue mastery and refinement, while others embrace the tactility of chance, preserving moments of imperfection as an intrinsic part of the work's evolution. All engage with an ongoing dialogue between thought and material, allowing one to inform the other in an iterative cycle of making, questioning, and refining.

Throughout this research, the intersections between materiality, process, and conceptual inquiry reveal how contemporary sculptural practice operates as a space of both rigorous investigation and boundless possibility. By interweaving the work of these six artists, this thesis reveals a network of concerns, methodologies, and approaches that extend beyond national borders, beyond disciplinary confines, and beyond conventional expectations of what art can achieve. Rather than seeking definitive conclusions, it is an invitation to consider the ways in which artists navigate the intricacies of making in a rapidly shifting world. Their practices offer a means of understanding, questioning, and reimagining the structures that shape our experience of contemporary art.

Chapter One: National Identities

Art is inextricably linked to the socio-political and historical contexts of each nation, shaped by distinct conditions that influence cultural production and identity. An examination of the historical forces that have shaped Australian and New Zealand national identities is crucial to understanding the perspectives of their contemporary artists. Both countries are dynamic and multicultural, shaped by the broader currents of Asia and the Pacific, not only through visual culture but also via economic, political, and diasporic interactions. Australia and New Zealand have been profoundly shaped by colonialism and its enduring postcolonial ramifications, which continue to inform artistic expression and national identity. As Nadia Atia and Kate Houlden argue in *Popular Postcolonialisms: discourses of empire and popular culture*, postcolonial discourse extends beyond historical recollection to interrogate how colonial histories manifest in contemporary cultural production - whether through mythologisation, critique, or sublimation.⁵⁶ The imprint of empire remains immutable in visual culture, impacting how artists negotiate national identity both locally and internationally.

This chapter explores art's role in shaping the national identities of Australia and New Zealand, both as envisioned by artists and as perceived by audiences. National identity fluctuates depending on context. For instance, a New Zealand artist exhibiting domestically contributes to the viewer's perception of national identity through familiar cultural references. However, when the same artist presents work internationally (as many included in this research do), they construct an identity shaped by an audience that may lack an intrinsic understanding of New Zealand's history, values, and politics. This international context plays an instrumental role in shaping global perceptions of both nations.

⁵⁶ Nadia Atia and Kate Houlden. *Popular Postcolonialisms: Discourses of Empire and Popular Culture*. Routledge Research in Postcolonial Literatures. 1st ed. Oxford: Routledge, 2019.

Artistic engagement with national context has evolved significantly over time. Both Australia and New Zealand now operate within a post-nationalist framework, where contemporary art is often produced in dialogue with international and cross-cultural concerns, rather than as a direct expression of national identity. This chapter traces the trajectories of such practices, examining how artists navigate these shifting contexts. Ironically, many of the artists who have brought critical attention to Australian and New Zealand art do not reside in their countries of origin. Upritchard, who represented New Zealand at the Venice Biennale, is based in London, while Newby lives and works in the United States. Other prominent contemporary artists have chosen to base themselves in the global North, including Emma McIntyre, Fiona Connor, and Ricky Swallow in Los Angeles, Sriwhana Spong in London, and Simon Denny in Berlin. The shared momentum of an internationally dispersed cohort informs cultural evolution in their countries of origin. Participation in the international art discourse predominantly requires proximity to the cultural centres of the Northern Hemisphere, rather than a firm identification with one's nation. As a result, much of the work that shapes the global perception of Australian and New Zealand art is created from a distance - informed by these places yet produced from their antipodes.

The construction of national identity through art is particularly well-articulated in Francis Pound's *The Invention of New Zealand: art and national identity, 1930-1970*. Pound examines how art has historically been leveraged to fabricate a distinct national identity, offering crucial insights into New Zealand's artistic landscape. Pound's earlier work, *Frames on the Land: early landscape painting in New Zealand*, analyses how immigrant artists imposed European artistic conventions upon the depiction of the New Zealand landscape, reinforcing inherited perceptions of the land as sublime and untamed.⁵⁷ This historical framing of New Zealand's national identity parallels Australia's trajectory in its negotiation

⁵⁷ Francis Pound. *Frames on the Land: Early Landscape Painting in New Zealand*. Auckland: Collins, 1983.

of colonial legacies, wartime narratives, and evolving relationships with international discourse. Yet while both nations share aspects of an “antipodal psyche”⁵⁸ - defined by geographic isolation, post-colonial introspection, and cultural differentiation from the global North - their national identities have diverged in emphasis. Australia’s identity has often been shaped through its convict-settler foundations and expressions of nationalism, whereas New Zealand’s has developed through a more visible negotiation with biculturalism and Māori sovereignty, albeit working through its own nationalist period. Both contend with the enduring impact of colonisation, but the frameworks through which cultural self-definition and Indigenous recognition occur differ in their articulation and public presence.

Simon During, a leading New Zealand-born cultural theorist, has made significant contributions to the study of postcolonialism and national identity, particularly regarding New Zealand. In ‘Nationalism, Postcolonialism and Globalization’ During examines the interplay between postcolonial societies and globalisation, highlighting how global cultural flows impact national identities.⁵⁹ He critically assesses nationalism in postcolonial contexts, exploring how national identity can equally empower and constrain cultural expression. His work also addresses the intersection of postcolonialism and postmodernism, analysing how both frameworks engage with issues of identity, representation, and power in contemporary societies. During frequently explores the dynamics between Indigenous populations and settler communities, focusing on how these relationships shape national identity in New Zealand. Additionally, he discusses cultural hybridity, examining how the blending of Indigenous and settler cultures produces hybrid identities that challenge conventional national narratives. During’s research provides crucial insights into the complexities of postcolonial identity formation. Furthermore, the intersection of postcolonial theory and art offers a

⁵⁸ Ian McLean. *Double Nation: A History of Australian Art*. London: Reaktion Books, 2023, 11.

⁵⁹ Simon During. “Nationalism, Postcolonialism and Globalization.” In *The Cultural Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 2007, 169-232.

framework for examining how historical power structures continue to shape contemporary artistic expression. Marxist theories of cultural hegemony suggest that dominant groups establish societal norms, values, and cultural production. Within Australian and New Zealand contexts, Indigenous artists and those from diasporic backgrounds frequently engage in practices that subvert these hegemonic narratives, offering counter-discourses that challenge colonialist perspectives. As Atia and Houlden argue, popular culture can be a site where elite conceptions of history are contested, and even middlebrow cultural production can serve as an unexpected arena for challenging colonial tropes.

Kwame Anthony Appiah, in his essay “There Is No Such Thing as Western Civilization” (which I read after encountering Langdon-Pole’s reading list⁶⁰), assesses the notion of a monolithic ‘West,’ asserting that cultural identity is not an inherited, static essence but an evolving and negotiated process, lived with others. Culture - like religion, nation, and race - can both shape identity and impose confinements, yet it also offers a framework through which freedom and belonging can be expressed. Appiah stresses that social identities operate across scales, grounding people in local relationships while making “a wider world [more] intelligible, alive, and urgent.”⁶¹ Similarly, national identities in Australia and New Zealand are shaped by artistic practice and contemporary sociopolitical debates. The concept of ‘Western civilization’ itself is a construct shaped by imperial histories and narratives of cultural superiority. If culture is not a fixed entity but a process one actively engages with, then national identity remains fluid, constantly redefined by artistic interventions that challenge colonial legacies and propose alternative visions of belonging. Appiah’s perspective reinforces the relevance of relational thinking, cultural fluidity, and the necessity of transnational awareness in contemporary artistic and intellectual practice.

⁶⁰ <https://citygallery.org.nz/blog/zac-langdon-poles-reading-list/>

⁶¹ Kwame Anthony Appiah. “There Is No Such Thing as Western Civilisation.” *The Guardian*, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/09/western-civilisation-appiah-reith-lecture>.

The capacity of art to expose and reimagine national identity is especially relevant in today's globalised society. As nations increasingly compare their politics and values to those of others, art becomes a crucial medium through which these comparisons are articulated, revealing harmonious or fractured histories, and serving as a mechanism for change beyond the art world. As transnationalism and globalisation intensify cultural exchanges, the role of art in shaping national identity becomes increasingly complex. Contemporary Australian and New Zealand artists frequently engage with themes of postcolonialism, Indigenous knowledge systems, and cultural hybridity, positioning their work within broader global discourses. These transnational and diasporic artistic practices challenge understandings of national identity and question how cultural belonging is constructed both within and beyond national borders.

1.1 Australia

Australia, in 1835, was declared *Terra Nullius*⁶² by British colonisers. This declaration dismissed the sovereignty and continuous presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, erasing complex systems of land care, and cultural belonging. As a rhetorical and ideological tool, *Terra Nullius* laid the groundwork for a colonial condition structured by absence and denial. The Australian continent, with its vast interior and arid horizons, was marked as a blank slate for imperial inscription, despite being home to the oldest continuous culture in the world. This imposed emptiness formed one of the key fault lines in the nation's historical consciousness, dividing settler imaginaries from the lived and ancestral realities of Indigenous peoples.

In an essay for the *Griffith Review*, Michael Wesley evokes this disjunction with striking clarity. He describes Australia as

a huge, dry, bulbous tile, sitting at the end of a chain of shards that dribbled out from Asia. Unlike the smaller islands in the chain, it had no exotic spices to entice and numb the European palate. It played no role in the highways of trade and culture

⁶² *Terra Nullius* (Latin): land belonging to no one.

sketched across the oceans between Africa and Siberia. The most advantageous position of this great sullen landmass - its top-left shoulder, which looked west to the Indian Ocean - was ignored. The colonisers instead chose the opposite corner: a stubbled coast that looked east and south to the almost empty vastness of the Pacific and the Antarctic. They fanned out across the world's oceans in the greatest real estate race in history. The people who already lived in these pieces of new-release real estate didn't count. They weren't part of the great race. Their land was fair game.⁶³

Wesley's description illuminates how land was encountered as an object of possession, and as real estate to be claimed, charted and divided. The transformation of Australia from a penal colony⁶⁴ to a settler colony, particularly from the 1820s onwards, marked the rise of what historian James Belich calls "settlerism"⁶⁵ - an ideological force that modernised colonial economies and masked the violence on which they were built. Art historian Ian McLean writes, "settlerism concealed the genocide and theft upon which it was founded,"⁶⁶ recasting the expansion of British control as progress and civility. The Indigenous custodians of the land were rendered invisible, and their sovereignty overwritten by imported systems of ownership, agriculture, and governance. This severance of people from place is an integral notion in colonial logic. Robert Hughes, in *The Fatal Shore*, observes "Australian racism began with the convicts, although it did not stay confined to them for long; it was the first Australian trait to percolate upward from the lower class."⁶⁷ This legacy haunts Australian culture and art to this day.

McLean, in *Double Nation*, articulates the parallel foundation myths of Australia - one rooted in the 60,000-year history of Aboriginal cultures and another in colonial expansion from the late eighteenth century. He writes, "the realisation that Australian art is a

⁶³ Michael Wesley. "The Land at the End of the World: Yearning for Confidence and Purpose." *Griffith Review*, no. 36 (2012), 178.

⁶⁴ Colonisation began in 1788 with the First Fleet's arrival at Sydney Cove, marking the establishment of New South Wales as a penal colony. This initiated British expansion across the continent, resulting in the dispossession of First Nations peoples and the imposition of colonial rule.

⁶⁵ James Belich. *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Angloworld*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 153.

⁶⁶ McLean. *Double Nation*, 38.

⁶⁷ Robert Hughes. *The Fatal Shore: A History of the Transportation of Convicts to Australia, 1787-1868*. London: Collins Harvill, 1987, 95.

racist construct”⁶⁸ underlines how early colonial representations of land were often filtered through European ideals. Rather than reflecting the Australian landscape truthfully, they depicted “a new Britannia in another world”⁶⁹, a mythic projection of imperial nostalgia. The dissonant tone between these dual inheritances contributes to what McLean terms the “antipodal psyche,”⁷⁰ a deep cultural ambivalence born from Australia’s geographic remoteness and ideological entanglement with Empire.

For the settlers who arrived in Australia, the search for a ‘home’ was both a literal and symbolic endeavour - a desire to reconstruct familiarity within an unfamiliar and hostile landscape. In contrast, the concept of ‘home’ held different connotations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Their cultural relationship to land was not framed through notions of ownership or permanent settlement, but through movement, custodianship, and the intergenerational transmission of stories that bound people to place. They did not think of land as belonging to them, rather that they belonged to the land. The term ‘belonging’ carries a dual implication. It denotes possession or ownership, as well as evoking a profound sense of connection to place. The idea of belonging carries heavy cultural and historical weight, especially in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Art historian, Mary Eagle observes the concept of ‘home’ as a key to cultural identity (and furthermore colonial culture), shaped through simultaneous longing and dislocation⁷¹. During the fraught period of Australia’s colonisation, two fractured visions of home emerged: the settler’s Australia, where “the settlers dressed Australia in the names, rituals, and structures of the distant home,”⁷² and the Aboriginal experience, for whom home remained physically present yet was being

⁶⁸ McLean. *Double Nation*, 14.

⁶⁹ Wentworth, William Charles Wentworth. *Australasia*. 1823.

⁷⁰ McLean. *Double Nation*, 11.

⁷¹ Mary Eagle. “Expressions of Social Identity by Settlers and Indigenes in the First 80 Years of British Colonisation.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Art*, edited by Jaynie Anderson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 44.

⁷² Eagle. “Expressions of Social Identity”, 44.

irrevocably altered. These two divergent and irreconcilable visions created a fissure between epistemologies of place - an imposed European model and a displaced Indigenous one. Philosopher, Jeff Malpas asserts that “the fundamental character of place in relation to human being is evident in the way in which place, whether expressed in terms of land, earth, or country, figures so prominently in the life and experience of indigenous societies and cultures.”⁷³ He further argues that “to look to the intelligence of place is thus to look both to the character of place and to the character of our encounter with place,”⁷⁴ emphasising that “place is not identical with our thinking of it.”⁷⁵ Applied to colonial settlerism, this perspective highlights the complex entanglements (both individual and collective) between place, experience, and subjective perception. “Australia’s conception, gestation and birth came from expansion and schism, escape and avarice. Little wonder its new settlers built their own meaning - and that of the place they lived in - around how they fitted into the global convulsions that had spawned them,”⁷⁶ adds Wesley. These ‘global convulsions’ spawned not only the migration of people and societies, but also art and visual language. Artistic expression became a site where these tensions were mapped, negotiated and displaced.

In her essay ‘The Land: Dreams and Disappointments’, Julianne Schulz writes “there are threads that run like arteries through a nation and in this country one is the land. It is the source of many of the sustaining myths, preoccupations and conflicts - the biggest dreams and the greatest disappointments. From the boastful national conversation about property prices to the nagging unease about sustainability and native title, the nature of our obsession with land changes with the season but is never far away.”⁷⁷ Schulz notes this a not a preoccupation that is unique to Australians but underscores its effect on the communal

⁷³ Jeff Malpas. *The Intelligence of Place: Topographies and Poetics*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015, 4.

⁷⁴ Malpas. *The Intelligence of Place*, 1.

⁷⁵ Malpas. *The Intelligence of Place*, 1.

⁷⁶ Wesley. “The Land at the End of the World”, 181.

⁷⁷ Julianne Schulz. “The Land: Dreams and Disappointments.” *Griffith Review*, no. 2 (2003): 5.

psyche. Schultz's diagnosis speaks to both the economic and spiritual charge of land in the national consciousness. The idea of land - as inheritance, as extractive resource, as ancestral terrain - has shaped the nation's legal and political structures, as well as its artistic production. "Our land stories - or what Melissa Lucashenko calls 'earthspeaking' - have their own cadence, their own resonance and their own trip wires. The physical nature of the land, the spiritual dimension of the land and the trajectory that has made ownership of the land the key to personal wealth since white settlement are now hard-wired into the Australian psyche."⁷⁸ Australian art has reflected and refracted this entanglement; from the early colonial landscapes (depicting sublime nature, or an idealised vision of home), to more recent interventions that interrogate these colonial fault lines, artists in Australia have long responded to the urgencies of land. The terrain continues to hold potent symbolic charge. The land is not merely a backdrop but an active player in shaping national identity.

Australia's emergence from its settler and imperial artistic traditions can be traced to the arrival of modernism in the 1920s, following the First World War. Artists of this era either clung to nostalgic romanticism or embraced new modernist ideals, catalysed by increasing international travel and exposure. The Australian landscape, previously idealised, began to be portrayed with a starker realism. Artists offered varied interpretations: Eagle described it as "a hard, stern land...something cruel in it,"⁷⁹ Hans Heysen noted its "strange forms, beauty of colour, [and] clear light,"⁸⁰ while Lionel Lindsay evoked its "nakedness of Earth...desolate splendour [that] gives the sensation of an unalterable landscape, old and young as Time - a landscape of fundamentals, austerely Biblical, and yet for us associated with our aboriginal stone age."⁸¹ Heysen's excursions into central Australia led to a pivotal

⁷⁸ Schulz. "The Land: Dreams and Disappointments.", 5.

⁷⁹ McLean. *Double Nation*, 150.

⁸⁰ McLean. *Double Nation*, 150.

⁸¹ McLean. *Double Nation*, 150.

relationship with Arrernte artist Albert Namatjira⁸². Namatjira, alongside Rex Battarbee, established Australia's first transcultural school of painting at Hermannsburg, which endures through the Hermannsburg Potters (fig.32). This cultural exchange marked an early move toward Indigenous inclusion in the national art story. In 1929, the exhibition *Australian Aboriginal Art* opened at the Melbourne Museum, based on Baldwin Spencer's collections. It was the first significant institutional presentation of Indigenous work and declared that "every relic of the aboriginals... should be guarded as national possessions."⁸³ This moment signalled the gradual Aboriginalisation of Australia's national consciousness.

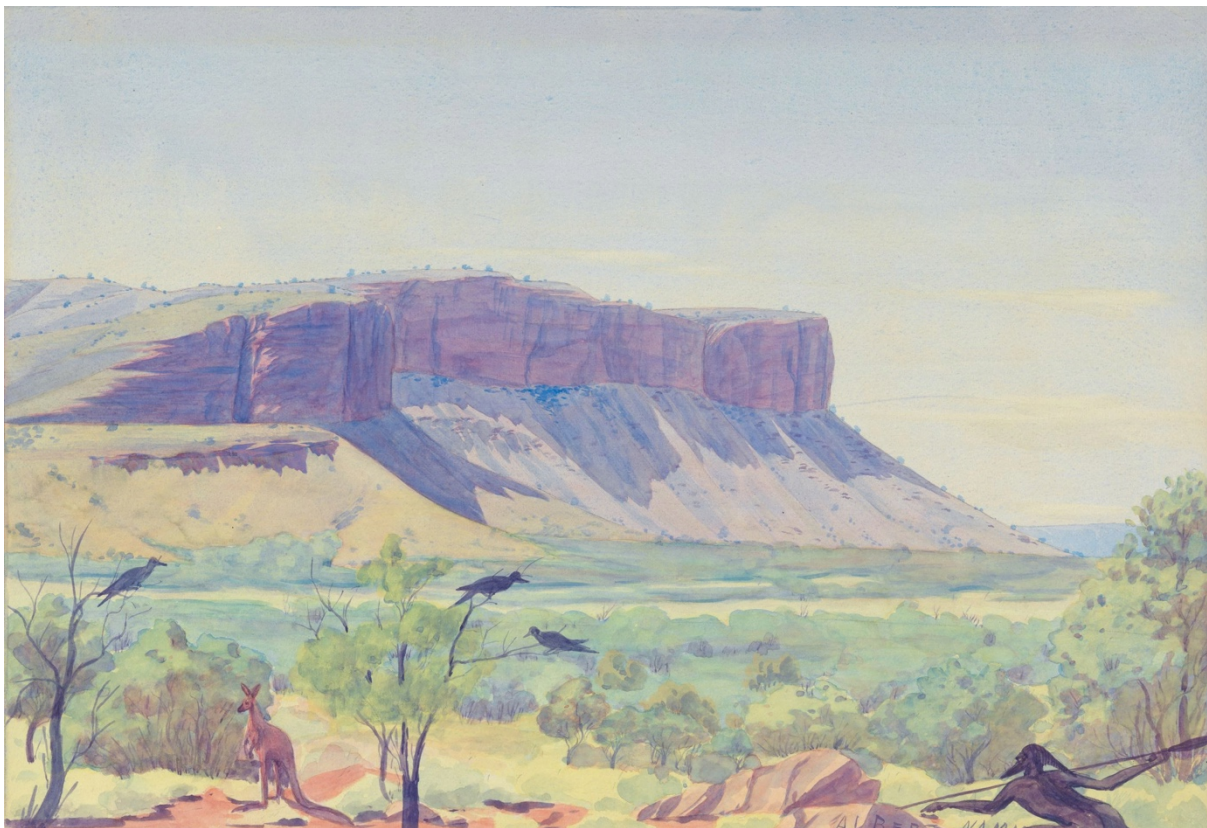


Figure 32. Albert Namatjira (Western Arrarnta people), *Mangeraka and hunter*, 1939.

⁸² Albert Namatjira (b. 1902, Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission) was introduced to Western painting in 1934 by Rex Battarbee and became the first Aboriginal artist widely recognised for working in a hybrid style that combined Indigenous and European traditions. Granted conditional citizenship in 1957, he was later imprisoned for supplying alcohol to other Aboriginal people, highlighting the ongoing inequities he faced. His work, though celebrated, was also criticised by national institutions as inauthentic - seen as neither fully Aboriginal nor Western - reflecting the complex position he occupied between two cultures. Namatjira remains a pivotal figure in both Australian art history and the struggle for Indigenous recognition.

⁸³ Charles Barrett. "The Primitive Artist." In *Australian Aboriginal Art, Exhibition Catalogue*. Melbourne: National Museum of Victoria, 1929, 12.



Figure 33. Albert Namatjira (Western Arrarnta people), *Standley Chasm*, c. 1945.



Figure 34. Iren Mbitjana Entata (Arrernte/Luritja people), *Pmere (My country)*, 1996. Earthenware, hand-built terracotta clay with underglaze colours and synthetic polymer paint, 42 x 44 x 44cm.

Margaret Preston's work reveals a distinct convergence of Aboriginal influences and Modernism. A vocal advocate for developing a uniquely Australian modernism, she drew on

Indigenous motifs, advocating for a national art rooted in place. As *Art in Australia* noted, she brought “a frank and primitive individuality,”⁸⁴ aligned with broader interwar interests in anthropological studies of the so-called primitive.



Figure 35. Margaret Preston, *Aboriginal Landscape*, 1941. Oil on canvas, 40 x 52cm.

The Second World War catalysed a new generation of Australian artists - Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd, and Albert Tucker - collectively dubbed “the Antipodeans”⁸⁵. Although recognised primarily in London, their work signalled a post-war rebirth in Australian art. Rejecting European romanticism, they turned inward to the continent, particularly its deserts. This shift was mirrored by Russell Drysdale, whose attention shifted from the settler figure to

⁸⁴ McLean. *Double Nation*, 160.

⁸⁵ Deborah Clark, Steven Tonkin, Gregory E. J. Evans and Australia National Gallery of Australia. *The Antipodeans: Challenge and Response in Australian Art 1955-1965 / National Gallery of Australia*. Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1999.

the Aboriginal figure, casting them “as resilient and symbiotic with the land, as if formed from it.”⁸⁶ Broader international influences permeated the practices of artists such as Ian Fairweather, who lived in self-imposed isolation on Bribie Island between 1953-1974. He produced work that fused Eastern and Western aesthetics while remaining neither place-specific nor overtly nationalistic. Painters John Olsen and Fred Williams embraced visual texture and abstraction drawn from post-war American art, expressing exuberant spontaneity and formal rigour respectively. Sculpture also entered the post-war conversation through artists like Inge King, a German refugee whose welded steel forms (fig.37) were inspired by works she had encountered in New York in 1949. Arriving in Australia amongst a wave of European-trained migrants in the 1950s, King likened the “depressingly provincial”⁸⁷ state of Australian art to “a can of flat beer.”⁸⁸



Figure 36. Ian Fairweather, *Painting*, c.1961. Synthetic polymer paint (polyvinyl acetate) and gouache on cardboard on hardboard, 46.5 x 71cm.

⁸⁶ McLean. *Double Nation*, 204.

⁸⁷ McLean. *Double Nation*, 235.

⁸⁸ McLean. *Double Nation*, 235.



Figure 37. Inge King, *Captive*, 1965. Bronzed steel, 131 x 67 x 52.5cm.



Figure 38. John Olsen, *Five Bells*, 1963. Oil on hardboard, 264.5 x 274cm.

By the late 1950s and into the 1960s, Modernism in Australia had matured. Bernard Smith's publication *Australian Painting*⁸⁹ (1962) and the founding of *Art and Australia* journal in 1963 marked a growing institutional interest in national artistic identity. Key exhibitions such as *The Antipodean* (1959), *Australian Aboriginal Art* (1960), and *Recent Australian Painting* (1961) at Whitechapel Gallery in London - curated by Bryan Robertson - amplified Australia's international visibility. Robertson praised the "prickly and

⁸⁹ Smith's publication sought to define an Australian artistic tradition; though notably, he positioned its origins at the point of British colonisation, effectively framing Australian art as beginning with European arrival.

ambiguous attitude toward nationalism”⁹⁰ he observed in Australian contemporary art, a sentiment echoed by Australian critic Robert Hughes, who believed that “groundwork was [being] laid for an Australian tradition.”⁹¹

Visionary figures helped bridge the international divide. In 1969, John Kaldor launched Kaldor Art Projects by inviting Christo and Jeanne-Claude to Sydney to ‘wrap’ Little Bay (fig.39) - an undertaking that seemingly echoed the metaphorical wrapping of a colonised country. Subsequent projects featured artists such as Gilbert & George, Joan Jonas, Charlotte Moorman, Nam June Paik, and Sol LeWitt. The inaugural Biennale of Sydney launched in 1973 at the newly opened Sydney Opera House. Moving to the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1976, the Biennale (essentially a triennial until 1982) introduced major international artists while showcasing Australian contemporary art.



Figure 39. Christo & Jean-Claude, *Wrapped Coast - One Million Square Feet, Little Bay, Sydney, Australia, 1969.*

⁹⁰ McLean. *Double Nation*, 220.

⁹¹ McLean. *Double Nation*, 220.

This fostering of international interest coincided with growing attention to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, which emerged with strength in the 1970s and has since become central to the national artistic narrative. It is pertinent to note the 1967 Referendum, which amended the Constitution to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the census and allowed federal legislation on their behalf. This marked a significant shift toward Indigenous recognition in both society and the arts, likely influencing the emergence of post-nationalist ideologies among Australian artists. Artists such as Namatjira, Emily Kame Kngwarreye, and the Hermannsburg potters have fostered trans-cultural dialogues that continue to reshape the definition of Australian art.



Figure 40. Emily Kam Kngwarray (Anmatyerre people), *Nyang Dreaming*, 1989. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 122 x 135cm.

Institutional support also deepened with the establishment of the Australia Council Act⁹² by the Whitlam government in 1975, offering sustained funding for artists, galleries, publishing, and exhibitions. The expanding network of state and regional public galleries, along with commercial, university, and artist-run spaces, significantly enhanced contemporary art infrastructure during this time. The first wave of contemporary Australian artists with international practices probed the definitions of painting and sculpture, teasing conceptualism and appropriation. Artists such as Ken Unsworth (fig. 41) and Mike Parr were in this pioneering generation, departing decisively from the national imperatives that had defined Australian art over the preceding five decades. Unsworth, who represented Australia at the 1978 Venice Biennale alongside Robert Owen and John Davis, was part of a generation whose works “made a remarkable impact as fine examples of a vernacular yet universal language...their prominence has both inspired and elicited investigation from subsequent generations.”⁹³ Successive artists such as Fiona Hall (fig. 42), Julie Rrap, and Tracey Moffat encountered a more supportive environment in which to explore installation, mixed media, sound, performance, video, as well as sculpture and painting. A younger generation - including Shaun Gladwell, Ricky Swallow, and Ben Quilty - further adapted new media and participatory forms, moving confidently between local and international contexts.

⁹² The Australia Council is a national advocate for the arts and works to increase national and international access to Australian arts and culture. The Australia Council was established as a Commonwealth statutory authority in 1975, and its functions were updated under the Australia Council Act 2013. (<https://creative.gov.au/about-us/>)

⁹³ Nick Waterlow. “The Creation of Contemporary Australian Art.” *Current: Contemporary Art from Australia and New Zealand*. Dott Publishing, 2008, 6.

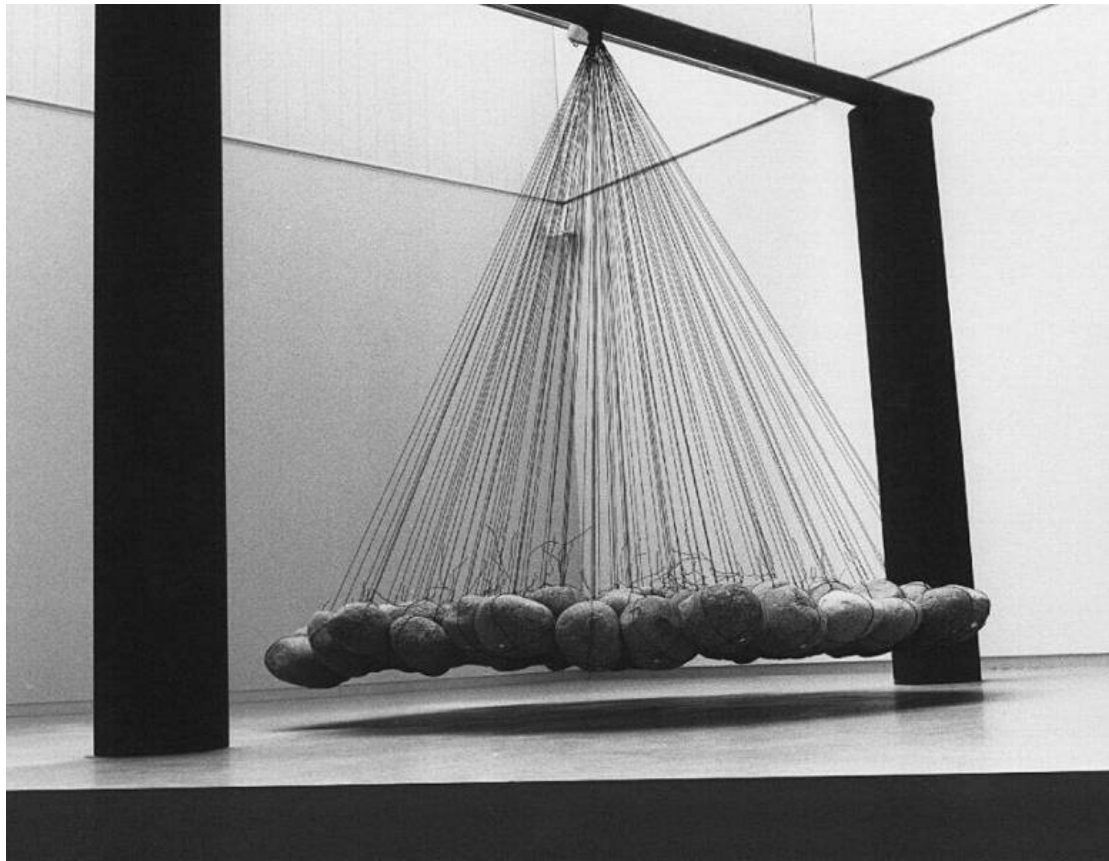


Figure 41. Ken Unsworth, *Suspended Stone Piece*, 1971-75. Metal, steel wire, stones, 350 x 451.5 x 374.5cm.



Figure 42. Fiona Hall, *White History*, 1998. PVC pipe, plastic, glass beads, silver wire, vitrine, 38.5 x 128 x 43cm.

Australian contemporary art today is pluralistic and diverse, facilitating both national and international dialogue. The vernacular, once grounded in landscape mythologies championed by figures like Nolan and Boyd, now encompasses varied perspectives on identity, place, nature, and medium. Institutions such as MONA serve to advance critical dialogue between contemporary art, national identity, and public discourse. Under the directorship of its founder David Walsh, MONA uniquely assembles ancient artefacts alongside contemporary artworks, disrupting traditional hierarchies of time and culture. Walsh states he has constructed “an environment that explores philosophies tangential to the artistic experience.”⁹⁴ He adds, “In a way, it's my megaphone.”⁹⁵ As Australia’s largest privately funded museum, MONA is free to present challenging juxtapositions and foster critical dialogue that public institutions often cannot. By situating artefacts and artworks in direct conversation, Walsh’s curatorial strategy emphasises relationality and conceptual resonance rather than historical precedence. The national art scene continues to be shaped by social discourse, cultural inclusivity, and an ever-evolving dialogue between Indigenous, diasporic and settler voices.

1.2 Aotearoa / New Zealand

Aotearoa, the land of the long white cloud. It is said when Kupe - a Polynesian explorer - arrived in (what is known as) New Zealand via canoe with his wife in 925AD, she saw the low-lying cloud formation covering the land masses and shouted “*He Ao, He Ao Tea, He Ao Tea Roa!*”⁹⁶ New Zealand’s colonial narrative and evolving national identity are closely bound to the land, in both physical and spiritual presence, as well as artistic representation. In Māori culture, the land was represented through stylised depictions of ancestral figures, chiefly *Papatūānuku* (Earth Mother) and *Ranginui* (Sky Father), often

⁹⁴ “David Walsh's Mona.” *NOWNESS*, 2012. <https://www.nowness.com/story/david-walshs-mona>.

⁹⁵ “David Walsh's Mona.”

⁹⁶ *Ao tea roa* (Māori): *ao*: cloud, dawn, daytime, world; *tea*: white, clear, bright; *roa*: long.

shown during their separation - a pivotal moment that brought light and enabled life to flourish in the forms of forests, animals and humans. Māori also marked the land itself with carvings and drawings (90% of which exists in the South Island⁹⁷) and carved wooden *pou*⁹⁸, which signified tribal boundaries, cultivation areas, and *tapu* (sacred) zones.

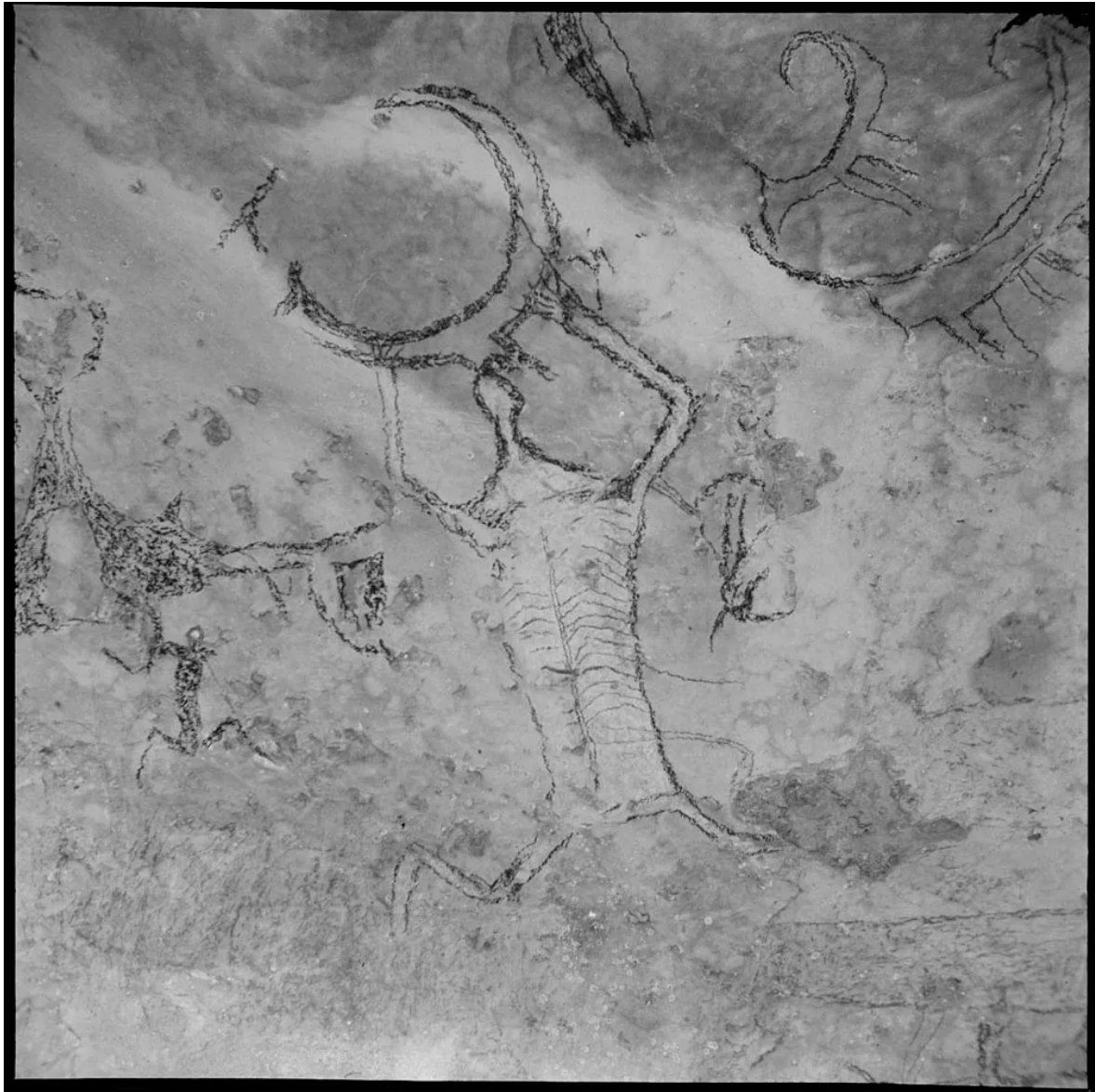


Figure 43. *Māori rock drawing, South Island, date unknown. Photographed by Theo Schoon, 1946-1949.*

⁹⁷ “Māori Rock Art - Ngā Toi Ana.” Te Ara - the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, 2014, accessed 29 May 2025, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/maori-rock-art-nga-toi-ana>.

⁹⁸ *Pou* (Māori): A post or pillar, often carved from a tree. A *pou* site and material carry cultural significance; frequently marking boundaries, honouring ancestors, or embodying symbolic meaning.



Figure 44. Carver unknown, *Pou tokomanawa 'Thutapu'* (carved centre post), North Island, 1800-1850. Wood, paint, 149 x 35 x 25cm.

The Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1840 by over 500 Māori chiefs, is a foundational yet contested document that continues to shape political and cultural discourse in Aotearoa. As settlers spread across the islands, the colonial gaze cast the landscape as both sublime and empty, shaping a mythology of nationhood through the rhetoric of nature. In *Frames on the Land*, art historian Pound outlines how early settler-artists perceived and framed the landscape through imported Romantic aesthetics⁹⁹, particularly the Sublime¹⁰⁰. He writes: “terror, obscurity, superior power, privation, vacuity, darkness, solitude, silence, vastness, magnificence, infinity, torrents; volcanic eruption etc.”¹⁰¹ were employed to capture a sense of nature’s overwhelming force and grandeur. This visual vocabulary served a dual purpose. It expressed both the spiritual awe of nature as well as a latent settler ideology that positioned the land as empty and unpeopled, ready to be claimed. For instance, Charles Heaphy’s surveying watercolours (fig.46) could be seen as “weapons of cultural conquest, soft missiles in the imposition of a powerful colonising vision.”¹⁰² Pound agrees that such works, ‘capturing’ the landscape, were “the beginning of [the] act of possession, shaping the land to European convenience.”¹⁰³ Solemn stillness and “utter solitude”¹⁰⁴ were key motifs in this narrative, resulting in a manufactured silence that erased Māori presence from the visual and narrative field. “That silence in New Zealand, often as not, was the silence of the Sublime.”¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Romantic aesthetics in art foreground emotion, imagination, and individual expression, often highlighting nature’s grandeur and the depth of human experience. Through vivid colour, dramatic composition, and expressive gesture, Romantic artists evoked wonder, awe and at times, a sense of terror.

¹⁰⁰ The sublime in art evokes similar emotions of awe, wonder and terror in response to forces that exceed human scale or comprehension. Moving beyond beauty, it confronts the limits of perception and gestures toward the overwhelming or unknowable.

¹⁰¹ Pound. *Frames on the Land*, 19.

¹⁰² Priscilla Pitts. “The Unquiet Earth: Reading Landscape and the Land in New Zealand Art.” In *Headlands: Thinking through New Zealand Art*. Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992, 88.

¹⁰³ Pound. *Frames on the Land*, 44.

¹⁰⁴ Pound. *Frames on the Land*, 20.

¹⁰⁵ Pound. *Frames on the Land*, 20.



Figure 45. William Hodges¹⁰⁶, *Waterfall in Dusky Bay with Māori canoe*, 1776. Oil on panel, 45.7 x 30.1cm.



Figure 46. Charles Heaphy, *Port Nicholson, from the Hills Above Petone*, 1840. Hand-coloured lithograph on paper, 23.5 x 39cm.

¹⁰⁶ William Hodges was an English painter who served as the official draughtsman on Captain Cook's second Pacific voyage aboard the *Resolution* (1772-75).

This erasure extended into cultural formation. New Zealand's early artistic output largely mimicked European traditions, with painting and literature favouring pastoral and romanticised imagery of land. During the 1920s, New Zealand's Education Department brought young artists from London to teach in technical schools. Among them, Christopher Perkins and Robert Field had a significant impact, the latter teaching students Toss Woollaston and Colin McCahon in Dunedin. The 1930s onwards saw a more self-reflexive artistic identity begin to take root. The South Island was central to New Zealand's avant-garde in the 1930s and 1940s, with Christchurch (and its Canterbury School of Fine Arts, now Ilam) and Dunedin fostering strong artistic communities. This shift marked the beginning of Aotearoa's contemporary art trajectory. Artists such as Rita Angus and McCahon turned their attention inward and local, fusing the symbolic weight of landscape with spiritual, political and personal concerns. McCahon's crudely abstracted hills and textual works reframed the landscape not only as site but as message imbued with existential and theological weight. In his 1966 essay 'Beginnings', McCahon reflects "I saw something logical, orderly and beautiful belonging to the land and not yet to its people. Not yet understood or communicated, not even really yet invented. My work has largely been to communicate this vision and to invent the way to see it."¹⁰⁷ By the 1950s and 60s, New Zealand's art world began to challenge its cultural conservatism and nationalist perspective. A younger generation of artists embraced modernism and abstraction, rejecting colonial nostalgia in favour of formal experimentation and conceptual inquiry. A new vision was being created, and artists such as McCahon confessed "I lived in a certain peace. No fashions [in art] existed at all."¹⁰⁸ While still entangled with the land, artists began to reckon more directly with its dissonances and dualities. New Zealand's national identity has been formed

¹⁰⁷ Colin McCahon. "Beginnings." *Landfall* December 1966 (1966), 364.

¹⁰⁸ McCahon. "Beginnings.", 364.

not just through its land, but through the layered and often conflicting ways it has been imagined, depicted and inhabited.

McCahon's practice has been synonymously connected with the evolution of New Zealand art and its artists. His work has played a crucial role in shaping Aotearoa's artistic identity, and it is impossible to be a New Zealand artist and not be aware of or influenced by his vision of place. As Justin Paton writes in *McCahon Country*, "McCahon's work not only gave shape to his interpretations of place but also shaped how New Zealand saw itself. His work was not a one-way looking but an act of reciprocity and vital exchange."¹⁰⁹ An early work by McCahon - *The Green Plain* (1948) (fig.47) - captures the Canterbury landscape in sublime and cinematic rendering. There are not many places so flat in New Zealand more so than the Canterbury Plains of the South Island, and this painting captures the vastness of bare land, presenting it as uninhabited and full of possibility.

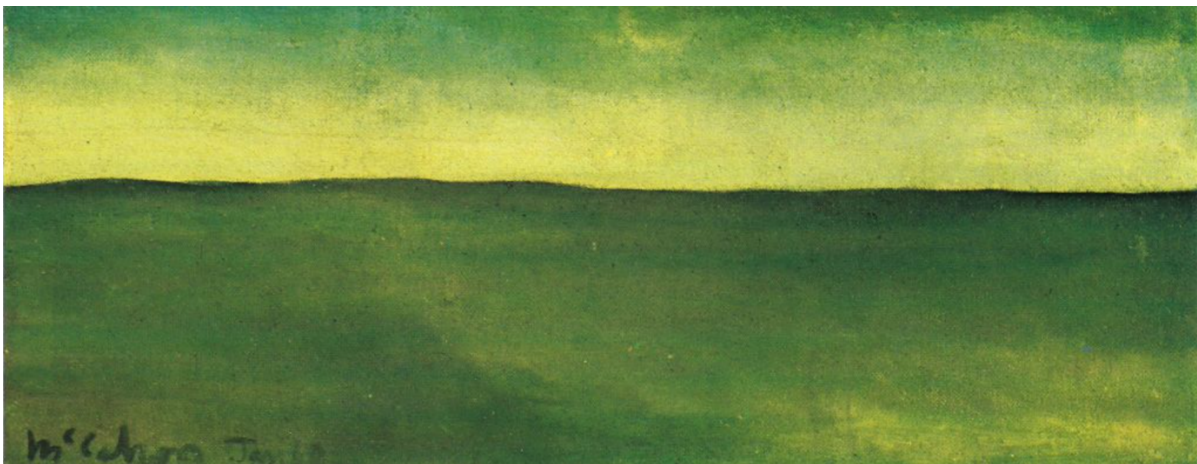


Figure 47. McCahon, Colin. *The Green Plain*. 1948. Oil on canvas, 37.4 x 91.7cm.

Many of his paintings reveal the immensity of bare land he witnessed - verdant green or volcanic black earth, bathed in golden or glaring sunlight. His work consistently identified with landscape - valleys, clifftops, wide vistas and radiant horizons. There is both a specificity of place (often alluded to in the work's title) as well as a universality. They are

¹⁰⁹ Justin Paton. *McCahon Country*. Penguin Books: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2019, 73.

depictions of real places, but they are also imagined. McCahon's land seems open and untouched, imbued with potential, offering viewer's a personal passage through it. Dark green kinks of earth rise into the frame, depicting a land that could only be formed by volcanic activity, tectonic movements, and oceanic storms that travel across seas. They are sparse yet abundant, empty yet alive. There is a sense of solitude woven into their expanses. One senses that they could sit in one of McCahon's landscapes for hours, watching, listening, wondering. This is a perspective encouraged in *The Listener* (1947) (fig.48). McCahon very rarely depicted a human form in his early paintings. In this work, the viewer is looking over the shoulder of someone (possibly the artist) out onto the land, their gazes merge to cast a unified vision. Pound believes this figure is "the Nationalist I and eye."¹¹⁰ The title invites a mode of listening - to an internal soundscape of wind, birdsong, or thought - or obliquely evokes the silence and solitude that Pound links to the Sublime. Perhaps McCahon is encouraging the viewer to listen to the land, to absorb the responsibility of paying attention. This is what I sense in this work, and similar open-ended questions posed by McCahon resonate throughout the practices of numerous contemporary New Zealand artists. There is often a strong tie to place, land, and *whenua*¹¹¹. While McCahon's work emerged during a period of heightened nationalism and cultural self-definition, it ultimately gave way to a post-nationalist generation that positioned itself in contrast to this inward-looking vision - embracing instead a more outward-facing, international perspective.

¹¹⁰ Francis Pound. *The Invention of New Zealand: Art & National Identity, 1930-1970*. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009, 7.

¹¹¹ *Whenua* (Māori): land, country, nation, ground, territory. *Whenua* is part of the identity of *tangata whenua*. It is *tūrangawaewae* - the place where we come from, the place we belong to, the place where we can stand. *Whenua* also means placenta.

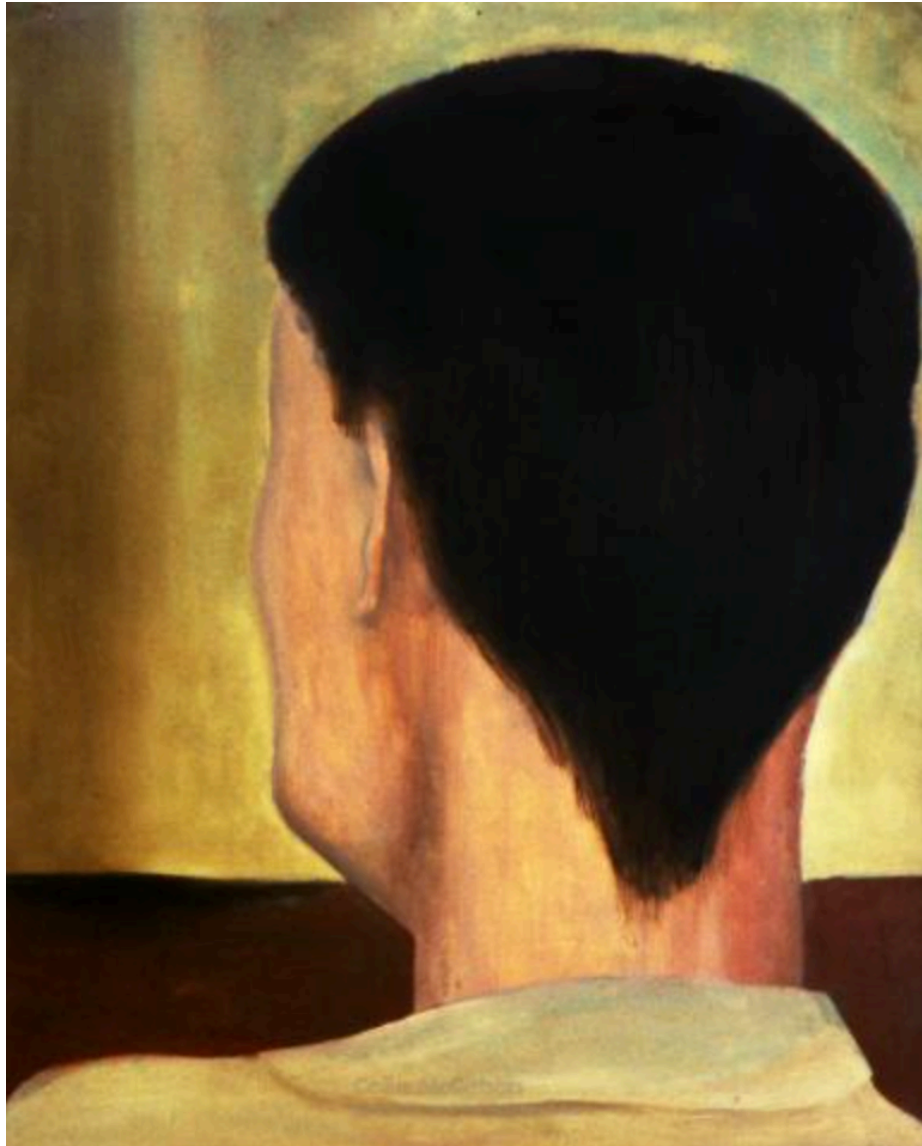


Figure 48. Colin McCahon, *The Listener*, 1947. Oil on cardboard, 45.7 x 35.5cm.

In the 1960s, artists such as Jim Allen pioneered radical forms of sculpture, marking the emergence of post-object and post-nationalist art in New Zealand. Pound observes the generations of post-nationalist artists now encountered an established “high culture”¹¹² to define themselves against, “where their Nationalist predecessors had only found a void.”¹¹³ This developed as postmodern international art began to influence artistic consciousness, influencing how artists engaged with material, process, and meaning. Allen redefined the

¹¹² Pound. *The Invention of New Zealand*, 366.

¹¹³ Pound. *The Invention of New Zealand*, 366.

artist as “a facilitator of a politicised experience, hoping to effect changes in the social discourse.”¹¹⁴ Championing de-materialised modes of practice, he prioritised concept and process over finished form, working with everyday materials like wire and polythene, as well as sound, light, text, and movement. Allen taught at Elam and Sydney College of the Arts (where he was also Director), encouraging collaborative exchange and relational dialogue. Subsequent artists sustained this approach, remaining “opposed to multinational capitalism and imperialism”¹¹⁵ while engaging with environmental, racial, and gender politics through their practices.



Figure 49. Jim Allen, *Tribute to Hone Tuwhare*, 1969. PVC, UV light, nylon thread, pegboard, square section aluminium tubing, vinyl, ink, 234 x 199 x 200cm.

¹¹⁴ Tony Green. “Modernism and Modernization.” In *Headlands: Thinking through New Zealand Art*. Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992, 154.

¹¹⁵ Green. “Modernism and Modernization.”, 154.



Figure 50. Jim Allen, *Tribute to Hone Tuwhare*. 1969. PVC, artificial UV light, nylon thread, wooden spheres, printed paper, text by Hone Tuwhare (“Thine own hands have fashioned” from *No Ordinary Sun*), 200 x 200 x 200cm.

1963 marked the establishment of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council (now Creative New Zealand) provided funding and institutional backing for artists, galleries, and exhibitions. The Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki (established 1888) and the Sarjeant Gallery (opened 1919) were long-standing institutions. The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery (established 1970, New Plymouth) has been a significant venue for contemporary art in New Zealand, known for its innovative exhibitions, residency opportunities, and support of experimental artists. Other public institutions such as The Dowse Art Museum (founded 1971), and Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (opened 1998), became vital

platforms for cultural, artistic and national discourse. The period around 1970, reflected in both New Zealand and Australian art histories, marks a rupture - an era in which “a new self-consciousness and new criticality”¹¹⁶ emerges, signalling the end of the nationalist paradigm. In the post-nationalist context that follows, artists still reference nationalist works through appropriation or readymade strategies, yet contemporary New Zealand art distinctly moves away from a nationalist lens or agenda. The Auckland Triennial (established in 2001) and the New Zealand Pavilion at the Venice Biennale have further connected New Zealand artists to the international stage, solidifying the country’s presence in the global art world.

Aotearoa and its landscapes draw heavily (still) on the notion of landscape and the sublime, often depicted as empty (or appears to be, although this may be due to farming and agricultural practices), full of possibility, “100% pure”¹¹⁷, and austere beautiful.



Figure 51. 100% Pure New Zealand campaign, 2005.

¹¹⁶ Pound. *The Invention of New Zealand*, 375.

¹¹⁷ ‘100% Pure’ was New Zealand’s first global branding campaign, launched in 1999 to highlight the country’s diverse landscapes, people, culture, and tourism experiences. The campaign targeted key markets, including Australia, Japan, the USA, the UK, Germany, and Singapore.

In the case of New Zealand, its ecology and environment are revered in its national identity, both historically and currently. During its pivotal nation-building moments of colonisation, post-war globalisation, and the rise of mid-century nationalism, the nation's artists expressed new visions of New Zealand. Figures such as McCahon, Rita Angus, and Doris Lusk played formative roles in constructing a sense of place through landscape, symbolism, and abstraction, offering early artistic visions of what New Zealand was and what it could become. These foundational narratives remain deeply embedded in the country's cultural memory.

From the late 20th century onward, the search for a postcolonial and bicultural identity has become a defining concern of New Zealand art. Artists such as Ralph Hotere, Shane Cotton, Lisa Reihana and Michael Parekōwhai have been instrumental in this shift, producing work that critically engages with Māori and *pākehā* histories. In this context, biculturalism is a political framework grounded in the Treaty of Waitangi, which continues to inform debates around representation, sovereignty, and cultural responsibility in New Zealand. The complexities of bicultural and increasingly poly-cultural identity in New Zealand art are marked by both richness and ambiguity. Robert Leonard, in the catalogue of *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art*, a landmark 1992 exhibition at the MCA in Sydney, reflects on the complexities of cultural appropriation in New Zealand art: “sometimes the borrowing is strictly formal. Other times, taking a well-heeled track, it would assert the fantasy of a newfound ethnicity. This fantasy may stem from an urge to be at one with the other, but it can also be a counterfeit, debasing the local currency.”¹¹⁸ Hotere, a contemporary of McCahon and a key figure in the development of Māori Modernism and biculturalism, moved fluidly between painting and sculpture, frequently incorporating

¹¹⁸ Robert Leonard, Mary Barr and Bernice Murphy. *Headlands: Thinking through New Zealand Art*. Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992, 61.

readymade or found objects to convey what he called “the intelligence in ordinary things.”¹¹⁹ This sensibility resonates in the work of Ward Knox. Hotere’s practice stands as a vital intersection of biculturalism, postmodernism, sculpture and painting, offering a model of conceptual and material hybridity.

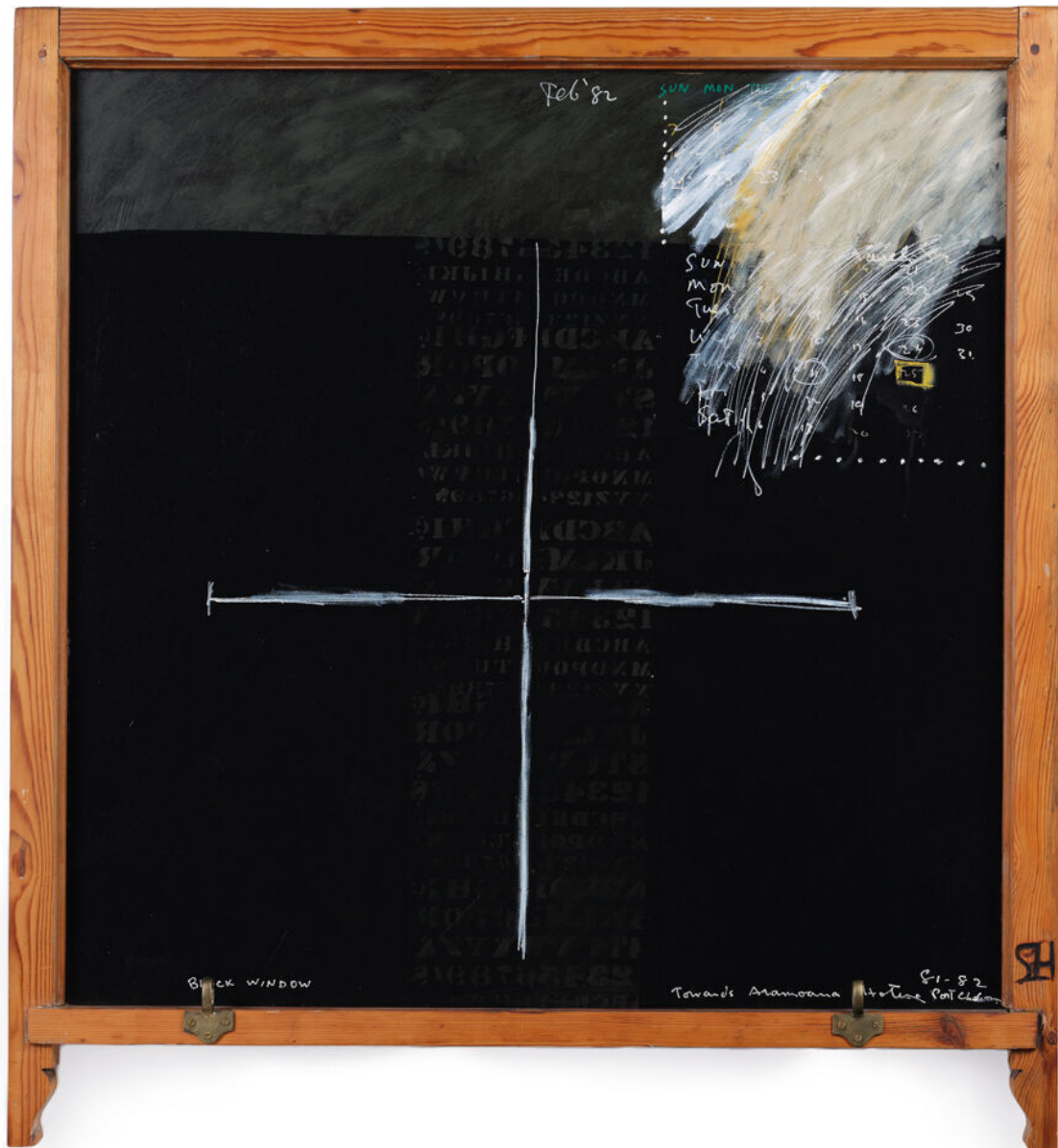


Figure 52. Ralph Hotere, *Towards Aramoana (Black Window)*, 1981-82. Oil on board, 99.5 x 101cm.

Parekōwhai, who represented New Zealand at the Venice Biennale in 2011, presented

¹¹⁹ Gregory O’Brien. *Hotere: Out the Black Window: Ralph Hotere’s Work with New Zealand Poets*. Wellington, N.Z.: Wellington City Art Gallery, 1997, 8.

He Kōrero Pūrakau mo Te Awanui o Te Motu: Story of a New Zealand River (fig.53) - a carved, high-gloss red Steinway grand piano that merges customary Māori carving with European musical heritage. Described as an “authentic fake”¹²⁰ and a “magnificent riddling object,”¹²¹ the work complicates notions of origin and diaspora. The piano - “cumbersome cultural baggage”¹²² lugged to New Zealand by colonisers - merges with the form of a *waka tīwai*¹²³, symbolising ancestry, treasured knowledge, and Parekōwhai’s own journey from Aotearoa to Venice. Activated through performance, the piano becomes a stage for shared experience, asserting a repositioning of New Zealand as a direct cultural source rather than peripheral.



Figure 53. Michael Parekōwhai, *He Kōrero Pūrakau mo Te Awanui o Te Motu: Story of a New Zealand river*, 2011. Original Steinway grand piano (Model D), brass, added timber, cast and flat bar steel, resin, ivory, ebony, mother of pearl, pāua and lacquer. Venice Biennale 2011.

¹²⁰ Megan Tamati-Quennell. “Decolonial Documents: Part Four.” *Frieze*, 2018. <https://www.frieze.com/article/decolonial-documents-part-four>.

¹²¹ Tamati-Quennell. “Decolonial Documents: Part Four.”

¹²² Justin Paton. “Weighing in, Lifting Off: Michael Parekōwhai in Venice.” In *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer: New Zealand at the 54th Biennale Di Venezia 2011 / Michael Parekōwhai*. Auckland, New Zealand: Michael Lett, 2012, 24.

¹²³ *Waka tīwai* (Māori): A plain, dugout canoe made from a hollowed-out log.

While biculturalism has served as a critical foundation, many artists working today reflect the wider diversity of contemporary New Zealand society, drawing on diasporic and cross-cultural experiences that produce complex interrogations of place, belonging, and cultural authority. Contemporary artists such as Simon Denny, Shannon Te Ao, and Yona Lee exemplify the evolving scope of current artistic practice, advancing the field through critical engagement with digital media, participatory frameworks, and expansive sculptural installations. The notion of the vernacular has evolved from a direct reflection of New Zealand's landscape and cultural heritage embodied in the work of McCahon and Gordon Walters - to a more expansive interrogation of identity, combining indigenous perspectives, Pacific influences, and global dialogues.

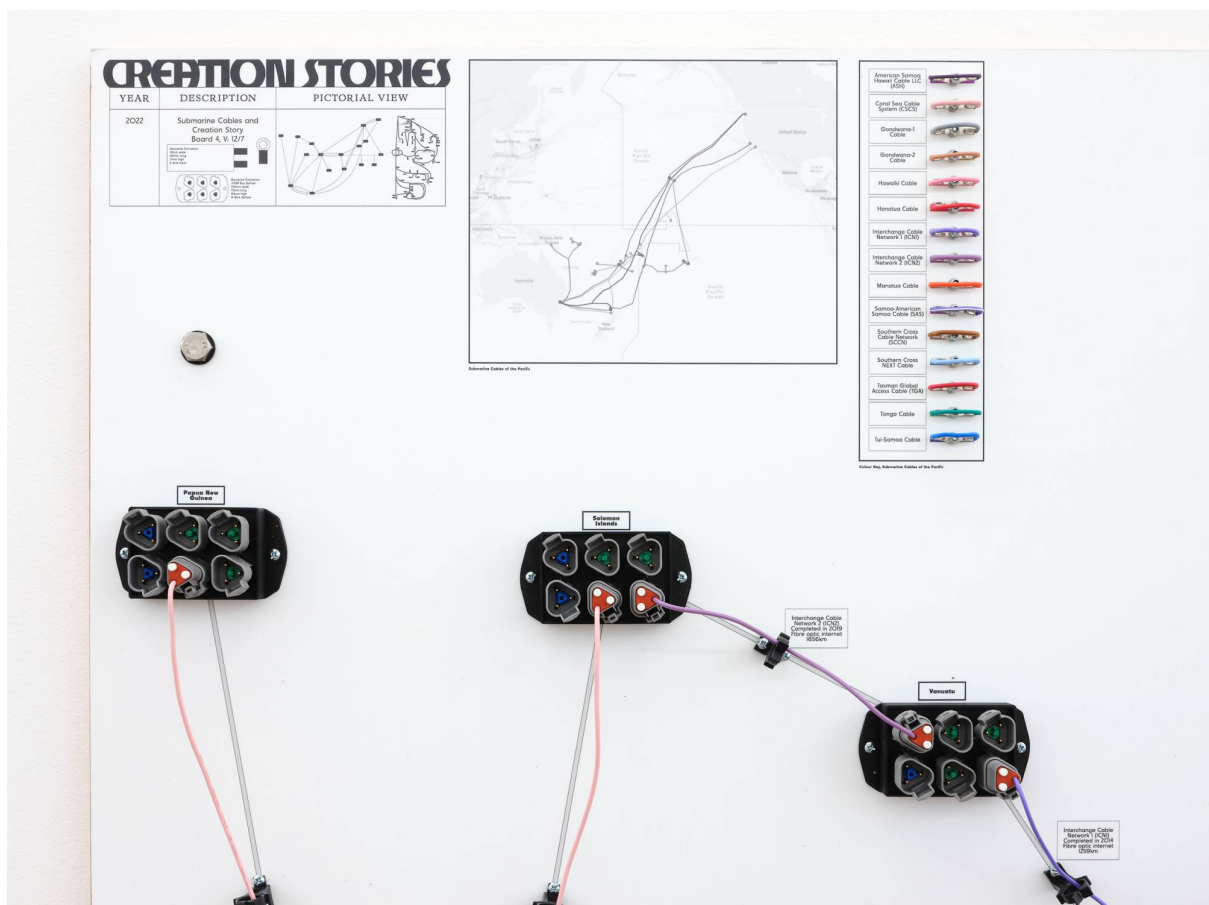


Figure 54. Simon Denny, Karamia Müller, *Creation Story Cable Harness 4*, 2022. Mixed media, cable harness wiring components, 122 x 244cm.

1.3 Current Threads and International Practice

Current threads which many contemporary Australasian artists are exploring include proximity, multiplicity, and convergence. Works created predominantly now rise from worldly conditions, even if they do exist in the commercial bubble that is the art world in these regions. Dr Victoria Lynn notes how the idea of the tyranny of distance has prevailed in the Australian psyche, having stemmed from “the model that situates Australia at the periphery of a European centre - a perception that arose during the period of British colonisation of the Pacific.”¹²⁴ The consequence of distance is keenly felt by Australian and New Zealand artists and can be both a liberating atmosphere to create and show work in, as well as a peripheral and insular outpost.

In 2024 I spoke with New Zealand painter Emma McIntyre, who now lives and works in Los Angeles. McIntyre (born 1990) completed a BFA (AUT) and MFA (Elam) in Auckland, before receiving a Fullbright Scholarship to complete a second MFA at the ArtCenter College of Design in Pasadena, California in 2021. McIntyre shared, “I felt very free leaving New Zealand, because I always felt like my work was too optimistic, too colourful, too big... it felt too colourful for New Zealand. I think [in New Zealand] people think work is only serious if it’s moody and dark, and it can’t possibly be serious and dark if it’s colorful. I really wrestled with that in New Zealand. I think of myself as a very serious painter, and I didn’t really feel like anyone understood the seriousness of my practice.”¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Victoria Lynn. “Current Fragments.” *Current: Contemporary Art from Australia and New Zealand*. Dott Publishing, 2008, 8.

¹²⁵ Emma McIntyre. By Alana Wilson. 2024.



Figure 55. Emma McIntyre, *Cythera*, 2021. Oil and oil stick on linen, 162.6 x 365.7cm.

Now living in Los Angeles, she is a full-time artist and exhibits with David Zwirner - the youngest on their roster of artists. She appreciates the proximity her work has to historical masterpieces. Having also shown in France with Air de Paris, she found the French audience appreciative of the visual dialogue between French painters such as Pierre Bonnard, and her work. She adds, even though the art world is small and connected, she feels that by being a New Zealand painter in America, and exhibiting in the US and Europe, she feels “unmoored of context, which is a really good thing.”¹²⁶

McIntyre’s reflection points to tensions in New Zealand’s art culture shaped by historical, aesthetic, and institutional conditions. A legacy of landscape painting and nationalist narratives in New Zealand painting fostered a preference for symbolic, morally weighted work. Mood and austerity remain markers of seriousness, while expressive colour or gesture may be viewed as decorative, naïve, or apolitical. In contrast, McIntyre’s work

¹²⁶ McIntyre. By Alana Wilson.

frequently references European and American art histories - drawing on the layered gestures of Sigmar Polke or Joan Mitchell, and the poetic expressiveness of Cy Twombly. She believes her work gains stronger contextual resonance when exhibited alongside such practices and viewed by audiences familiar with those visual languages. Although artists such as Gretchen Albrecht, Judy Millar and S rephine Pick have created voluminous, wildly colourful paintings, McIntyre’s work could be viewed as a continuation or iteration of this lineage. Her move to Los Angeles offered a liberating shift from what she perceived as a conservative critical environment, allowing her ambitious practice to be more fully recognised on its own terms. McIntyre’s sense of unmooring echoes McCahon’s sentiment of having “lived in a certain peace,”¹²⁷ free from the pressures of national discourse. For McIntyre, being outside New Zealand lessens the responsibility to fall into a certain lineage.

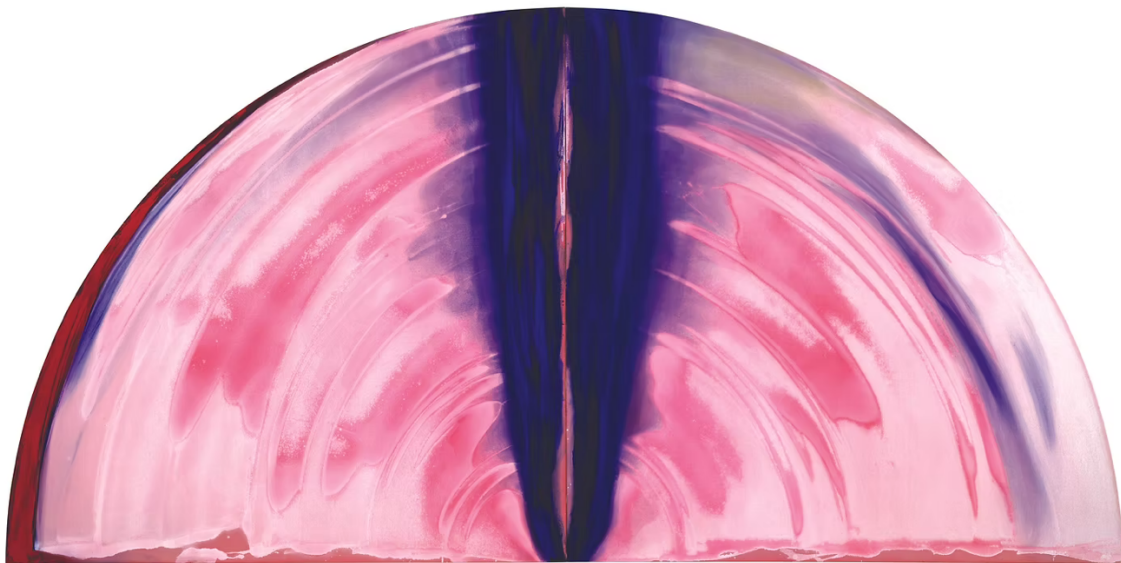


Figure 56. Gretchen Albrecht, *Exile*, 1985. Acrylic & oil on canvas, 183 x 366cm.

¹²⁷ McCahon. “Beginnings.”, 364.



Figure 57. Judy Millar, *Water on Your Forehead*, 2023. Acrylic on canvas, 180 x 140cm.

Newby has similarly navigated toward broader international visibility, gaining access to Northern Hemisphere art networks following her move to the US over 15 years ago. When I met Newby at an opening at Te Uru Gallery in Auckland in 2024, I asked whether she felt

something distinctive was emerging from the contemporary art communities of Australia and New Zealand. She reflected on the strength of these local networks, saying: “I can't find anything to resemble the arts community that we have down here in Australia and New Zealand. It's really individualistic. What we have down here is [an] accountability to one another.”¹²⁸ She believes the sense of community runs deeper than participation, adding that “people help each other out.”¹²⁹ She suggests that this closeness fosters both care and rigour, stating “people here [are] tough on each other, and I think that makes for really good artists. You have to learn how to talk about the work, stand beside it, and [be honest about what you] really think. There's an honesty here that I'm not seeing as much [elsewhere].”¹³⁰ According to Newby, the relatively small scale of the community contributes to sustaining this dynamic

Upritchard has lived away from New Zealand since 1998, yet she still returns annually to make work and spend time with family and friends. She reflects, “lots of New Zealand art, like McCahon, is very much about New Zealand - and it's a big world.”¹³¹ In her early career, whilst still living in New Zealand, she was careful not to make work that was “too inward looking,”¹³² although she did make several works in response to McCahon's oeuvre. *Land Table* (fig.58) is a deliberately rudimentary papier-mâché landscape, composed of monotone green hills mounted on a folding card table. Three of the hills feature openings resembling volcanoes, each fitted with LED lights activated by buttons along the perimeter. Its childlike construction and interactive format suggest a satirical engagement with New Zealand's nationalist art discourse. Though minor and rarely discussed, the work reveals a position that Upritchard was clearly interrogating at the time of its making, whilst she still lived in New Zealand.

¹²⁸ Kate Newby. By Alana Wilson. 2024.

¹²⁹ Newby. By Alana Wilson.

¹³⁰ Newby. By Alana Wilson.

¹³¹ Virginia Were. “Francis Upritchard Flies Solo in Europe and America.” *Art News Aotearoa*, no. 155 (2012).

¹³² Were. “Francis Upritchard Flies Solo.”



Figure 58. Francis Upritchard, *Land Table*, 1997. Found card table, papier mâché, buttons, LEDs, batteries, 85 x 80 x 80cm. Exhibited in *Jealous Saboteurs*, MUMA and City Gallery Wellington, 2007.

McCahon, 3rd Day (1998) (fig.59) is one in a series of six miniature landscape dioramas in eyeglass cases. The series, entitled *Six Days in Nelson and Canterbury* echoes the title of McCahon's 1950 work. Upritchard would have still been a student in Christchurch at the time and would have been acutely aware of McCahon's dominant presence in New Zealand's artistic identity. By referencing him she appears to both acknowledge his influence

and subvert it, viewing the New Zealand landscape through “the master’s spectacles”¹³³ whilst simultaneously shrinking it to a pocket-sized possession. This gesture can be read as a critical move to sidestep the nationalist and institutional reverence surrounding McCahon, a playful creation of her own pseudo-artifact in response.



Figure 59. Francis Upritchard, *McCahon, 3rd Day*, 1998. Found glasses case, plaster, oil, 5.5 x 14.5 x 8.5cm.

¹³³ Megan Dunn. *False Histories: On Francis Upritchard*. 2016.

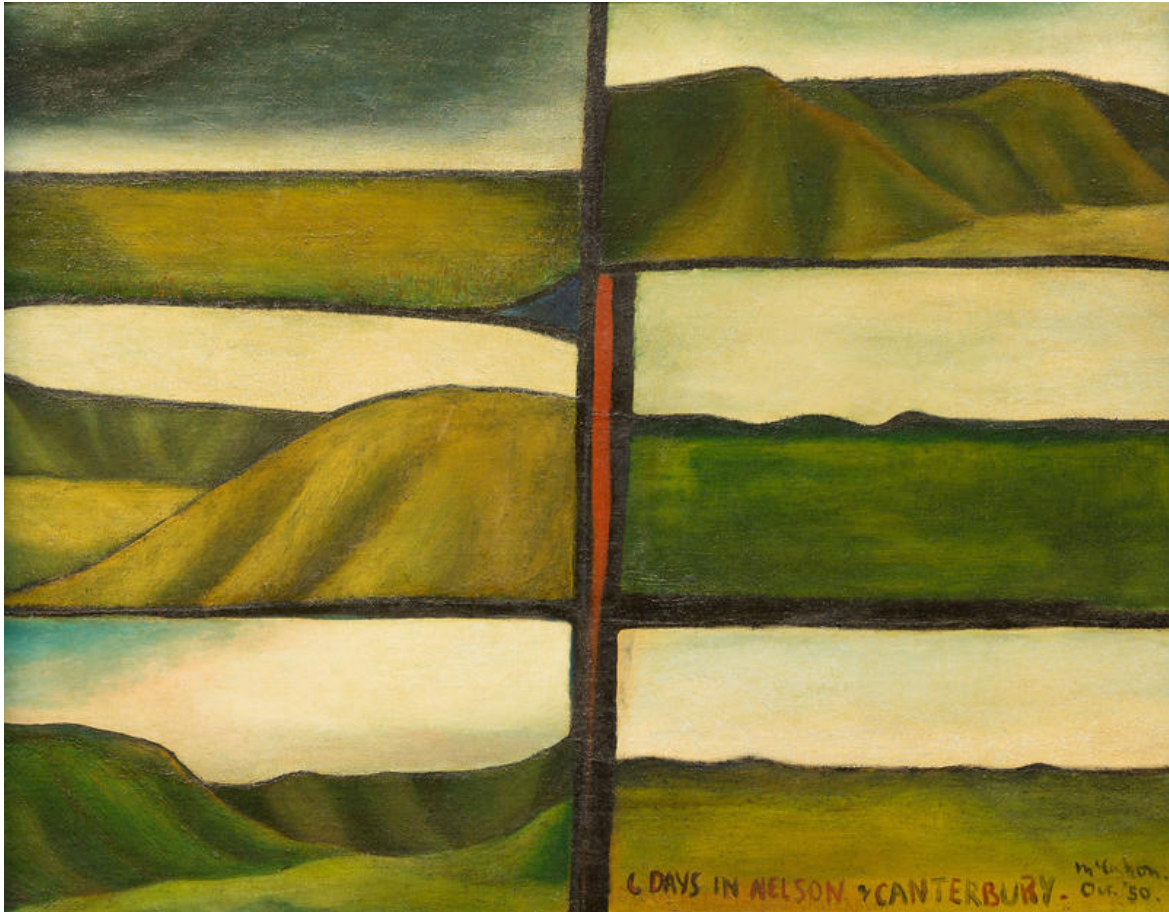


Figure 60. Colin McCahon, *Six Days in Nelson and Canterbury*, 1950. Oil on canvas on hardboard, 88.5 x 116.5cm.

McCahon stated of *Six Days in Nelson and Canterbury* (fig.60), “This painting I never explain but am often asked to. To me it explains itself. It was, I suppose, reconciling gains and losses, stating differences, hills and horizons. Simple. A bit of blood shed in the middle.”¹³⁴ Similarly, Upritchard articulates cultural difference and, in her own way, gestures toward the historical violence between cultures through her reimagining of artefacts and museological objects. The deep maroon case surrounding Upritchard’s landscape may evoke the bloodshed that underpins the nation’s colonial history. She’s also reflected on the perspective of place to her work: “Lots of my first works in the UK are about remembering New Zealand and simultaneously being exposed to new cultures.”¹³⁵ She adds,

That’s something I thought about a lot - what changes when you leave. The exposure I had to different forms affected me a lot - from Rome to Japan, Brazil to London,

¹³⁴ *Auckland Art Gallery Toi O Tāmaki: The Guide*. Auckland Art Gallery, 2001, 150.

¹³⁵ Rachael Vance. “Francis Upritchard.” *OCULA*, 2016. <https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/francis-upritchard/>.

absorbing the sculptures, architecture and crafts everywhere I went - and also emboldened me to reflect on the New Zealand cultural complexities in a potentially freer way, with a self-deprecating idea of how the modelling or making of something transforms the memory of what it actually was in the first place.¹³⁶

She has further interrogated her perspective of national identity in a 2019-21 work.

Upritchard's *Aotearoa* (fig.61) depicts a sinewy bronze figure, clamoured upon by another, appearing to push the central figure down by its head. The primary figure's legs and feet are entwined with snakes or eels, and although poised to step forward, the combined weight and entanglement keep it immobilised atop a small boulder. While Upritchard has not publicly articulated the work's intended meaning, the title suggests a personal reflection on national identity. *Aotearoa* may be read as an embodiment of the tension between rootedness and departure - an allegory for the New Zealander caught between the desire to move outward and the constraints of cultural, social or historical entanglement that keep one isolated atop a small rock, far from others.

¹³⁶ Tessa Giblin. "The Borrowings of Francis Upritchard." *Bulletin*, 2017, 43.



Figure 61. Francis Upritchard, *Aotearoa*, 2019-2021. Bronze, 230 x 90 x 55 cm.

For anyone who has traversed cultures and continents, perspective often emerges through the shifting proximity and distance from both origin and current place. Artists are no exception; particularly those from Australia and New Zealand, where the act of leaving - of creating distance - can become essential to understanding one's position in the world and relation to home. Curator Leonard "can't help but think that Upritchard's interest in Otherness is a New Zealand thing. On the one hand, she has left the country behind, becoming an international artist. On the other, she returns here to work and show, and knowledge of her origins informs the reception of her work. In New Zealand, we aren't allowed to forget our Otherness - we are identified with distance and we identify with distance."¹³⁷

Langdon-Pole has had similar distance from New Zealand, having spent time living and working in Berlin, Germany following the completion of his postgraduate studies at Frankfurt's Städelschule. He returned to New Zealand during the pandemic in 2020 yet maintains an engaged international practice. He has explored place and post-colonialism through his work in a multitude of ways, most prominently through his film work *Breath as Breath as Breath* (figs 62&63). The work is a montage of spliced clips from old New Zealand traditional animations (including children's cartoons, educational films, and a party-political advertisement), depicting natural and unpopulated landscapes.

¹³⁷ Robert Leonard. "Francis Upritchard: Adrift in Otherness." In *Francis Upritchard: Jealous Saboteurs* Melbourne: Monash University Museum of Art, 2016.



Figure 62. Zac Langdon Pole, *Breath as Breath as Breath*, 2020. Film (11min 38secs); music by Samuel Holloway.

The work begins with scenes of verdant and flourishing forestscapes, soon disrupted by ominous clouds that foreshadow a transformative event - potentially colonisation - followed by an infestation of borer beetles that symbolically devour the ecosystem. A series of bird sequences ensue, each illustrating behavioural shifts or evolutionary adaptations; a kiwi scratches for bugs in deforested undergrowth; a shining cuckoo usurps a nest by displacing another bird's eggs. These animal scenes, silhouetted through borer-ridden foliage, act as metaphors for ecological disruption and social displacement. The montage continues with shifting views of clifftops and rolling green hills, eventually overtaken by migrating birds and a cosmic, luminous wave - perhaps the wave of globalisation - washing across the land. A scene of a winding road and a collapsed picket fence (only one of two signs of human life depicted in the montage, the other being a shark net) suggest the erosion of boundaries or colonial demarcation. Scenes of felled trees and flowing rain imply both destruction and renewal, as brighter terrains regenerate. The film cuts to a beach scene, where a shark circles

a bay and shark nets hang underwater amongst sea life - interpretable either as symbols of extractive internationalism or of environmental containment strategies. Later imagery includes browning fields, drought-stricken islands, and storm-lashed coastlines - visual cues for global warming and anthropogenic climate change. The film ends on a speculative note; droplets rise like glowworms into a cosmic sky, evoking ancestral stars or *whetū*¹³⁸ as witnesses to Earth's ongoing cycles.



Figure 63. Zac Langdon Pole, *Breath as Breath as Breath* (stills), 2020. Film.

While the original animations variously rendered nature as background or protagonist, the montage reorders this hierarchy. Non-human life takes centre stage, prompting a re-evaluation of the 'natural' in national mythologies. Despite the apparent absence of humans, the stylised animation imprints intention, ideology, and authorship onto every frame. The film becomes a critical meditation on how ecological imaginaries are formed and potentially unsettled, prompting the viewer to consider their place in it.

¹³⁸ *Whetū* (Māori): star, stars, or other celestial bodies such as comets. In Māori cosmology, the stars are also seen as embodiments of ancestral beings and stories.

Langdon-Pole's work also has several recurring motifs of rocks and birds (figs 11, 63, 64, 65, 88, 103, 104, 105, 195). Birds imply location, journey, mapping, and movement, whilst rocks are immovable, geological markers of location, time, and minerals. Interestingly, Langdon Pole reflects on the recurring motifs of birds in New Zealand art; "in New Zealand art, birds are everywhere. They are this postage-stamp idea of New Zealand. But few people are having a critical conversation about that. On the one hand, they are metaphors for human experience. On the other hand, they represent the other. They exist between worlds, between the ground and the air. They have a lot to teach us."¹³⁹ Their presence, both in the cultural imagination and in his work, might serve to reinvigorate decolonial narratives, casting birds as migratory figures that cross seas and islands, always arriving far from home.



Figure 64. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Assimilation Study II (detail)*, 2017. Right wing Mandarin Duck, left human Scapula model, left wing Rosella, right human Scapula model, right wing Woodcock, left human Scapula model, left wing Mandarin Duck, right human Scapula model, right wing Rosella, dimensions variable.

¹³⁹ Robert Leonard. "Zac Langdon-Pole: Hurry Slowly." (2022). Accessed 6 February 2025. <https://robertleonard.org/zac-langdon-pole-hurry-slowly/>.

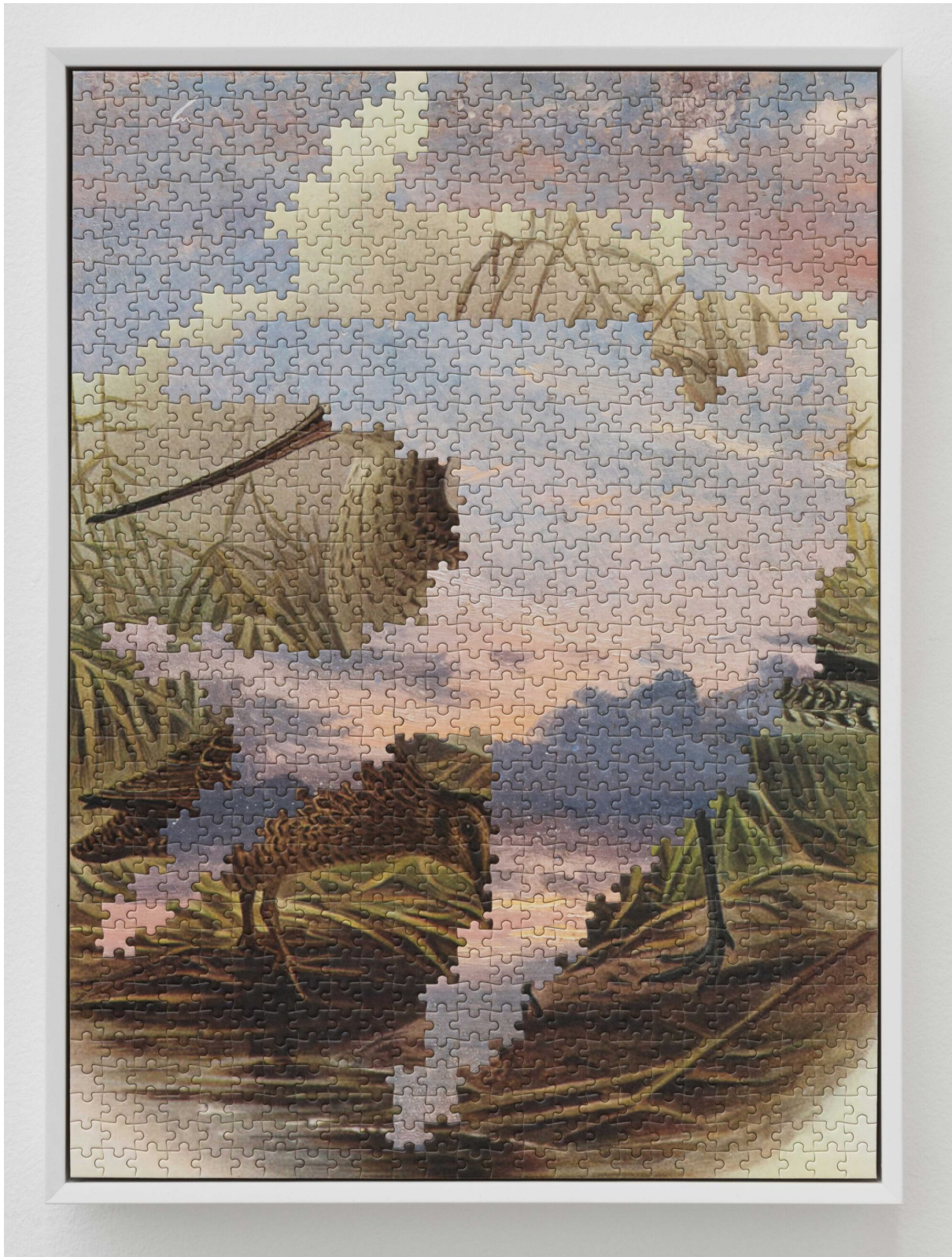


Figure 65. Zac Langdon-Pole, *On Ducks and Rabbits (i)*, 2021. Recombined jigsaw puzzles, 44.5 x 33cm.

Ward Knox spent a year living in Germany during the 2010s, an experience marked by intense homesickness. He recalls, “I used to dream about black soil, seabirds, and salt

air.”¹⁴⁰ Birds also appear in his work (figs 124, 125, 126), perhaps as symbolic gestures of seasonal navigation, transience, and the pull back to a familiar land. Reflecting on New Zealand, he states that “the land is bigger than any of us,”¹⁴¹ and expresses a sense of *kaitiakitanga*,¹⁴² which for him is grounded in the soil - in dirt, bugs, and ecological balance. He maintains a garden with the same care he gives to his artistic practice, each informing the other. “No good foundation should outshine that which it enables,”¹⁴³ he says, reflecting a belief in humility, interdependence, and respect for the systems that sustain life and culture. These values, deeply tied to community and land preservation, resonate with broader strands of Māori influence in contemporary New Zealand society. Yet, when asked to characterise the condition of New Zealand artists, he reflects: “If I were asked to choose one word to describe New Zealand artists it would be loneliness. In the past it may have been stoicism. Now, however, it is more forlorn, and more quietly optimistic.”¹⁴⁴

In the context of contemporary art practice in Australia and New Zealand, the question of national identity is entangled with broader ecological, political, and ethical concerns. Artists embody divergent yet interconnected reflections on place, responsibility, and global precarity, both in the content of their work and in their professional practice.

Armanious, long attuned to the legacies of post-industrial consumer culture, articulates a sceptical stance towards the demand for overtly topical engagement; “Life is life, and it’s got everything you want right there. There is no distinction, there never has been,”¹⁴⁵ he states, collapsing the divide between personal experience and global issues. Environmental and global conflict weigh on his mind, but he adds he is “not invested in any of it, but it’s just

¹⁴⁰ John Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson. 2024.

¹⁴¹ Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.

¹⁴² *Kaitiakitanga* is a Māori concept meaning guardianship or stewardship, encompassing the responsibility to care for and protect the natural environment - land, water, and resources - for the wellbeing of future generations. It reflects a holistic understanding of the interconnected relationship between people and place.

¹⁴³ Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.

¹⁴⁴ Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.

¹⁴⁵ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

so horrifying. It does keep me up at night thinking about it, but what that has to do with my work? Can art help?”¹⁴⁶ He believes that the broader conversations around such issues are what can bring solutions and change, saying “just bringing us all up together is all you can try and do. Not even practically but just to calm things down and really recognize how amazing it is to be here.”¹⁴⁷ This awareness and presence are imbued in his work, subtly affecting its own changes.

Carmody shares Armanious’s ambivalence toward the art world’s structures but expresses it through the lens of generational precarity, highlighting the contradictions within tertiary education, public funding, and the commercial art market. “There should be a little bit more duty of care in explaining the financial mechanisms of your own position as an artist and as a lecturer,”¹⁴⁸ he says. Yet, despite these institutional frictions, Carmody locates optimism in the resilience of artistic practice: “The act of [making art] is so sustainable, so generative and rich... it will continue on.”¹⁴⁹ Carmody believes artistic responsibility begins with material decisions, especially in the Australian context where “given the colonial history [and] using the natural environment, consultation needs to be made.”¹⁵⁰ He strongly believes “objects have power,”¹⁵¹ and whether working with synthetic or organic matter, his practice emphasises situatedness and accountability.

Upritchard also navigates the tension between artistic responsibility and existential scale. Reflecting on climate anxiety, she observes, “Trying to make work that’s really about right now is very difficult because it’s hard to see where you are, currently.”¹⁵² Her recurring use of dinosaurs reflects both her ecological fears and a psychological coping mechanism: “I

¹⁴⁶ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

¹⁴⁷ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

¹⁴⁸ Francis Carmody. By Alana Wilson. 2024

¹⁴⁹ Carmody. By Alana Wilson.

¹⁵⁰ Carmody. By Alana Wilson.

¹⁵¹ Carmody. By Alana Wilson.

¹⁵² Hald. “Artist Francis Upritchard: I Can’t Help the Whole World Heal.”

didn't really want to get into an anxious spiral... Dinosaurs had a massive event and they're gone, and would it be so bad if we did too? It's a little bit of an 'it's out of your hands' kind of thought."¹⁵³ This invocation of extinction is laced with dark humour but also gestures to a temporal perspective that exceeds human hubris. Upritchard's engagement with deep time, speculative history, and tactile, multi-scaled sculpture becomes a way of gently countering anthropocentric narratives. Her practice underscores the limits of knowing: "I'm sure we've got everything wrong and if we could go back, we'd see that we're hallucinating."¹⁵⁴ In this way, her work avoids despair and moralism, offering instead a provisional mode of making and understanding.



Figure 66. Francis Upritchard, *The Mother and Children*, 2021. Bronze, 42 x 56 x 27cm.

¹⁵³ Hald. "Artist Francis Upritchard: I Can't Help the Whole World Heal."

¹⁵⁴ Hald. "Artist Francis Upritchard: I Can't Help the Whole World Heal."



Figure 67. Francis Upritchard, *Paper Spinosaurus*, 2014. Papier-mache, metal armature and modelling, 76.2 x 258 x 46cm. Installed with Martino Gamper *Black and White Table* and *Ice Cream Chairs*.

Langdon-Pole's work extends this relational ethos through his careful assemblages. As Christina Barton notes, his practice "orchestrates a meaningful coalescence of pre-existing fragments... so that the world in all its complexity is momentarily held together."¹⁵⁵ He draws attention to the intricacies of language, climate, and history, using objects to open portals between natural, historical, colonial, and symbolic systems. His practice resists human exceptionalism and places the call to action (or call to change) upon the viewer.

Ward Knox's refusal to "culturally twitch to the present moment"¹⁵⁶ signals a conscious rejection of didacticism. Rather than overt political gestures, his practice enacts a quiet, enduring form of resistance. He shares "by focusing on a sustainable, increasingly local

¹⁵⁵ Zac Langdon-Pole. *Zac Langdon Pole's Art Journey: Constellations*. Hatje Cantz, 2019, 75.

¹⁵⁶ Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.

form of art making, utilising what is around me and diminishing the supply chains needed to get the works from idea to reality, I am living my politics, rather than preaching them.”¹⁵⁷

A shared ethic of situatedness, humility, and a refusal of grandiosity emerges across these practices. Post-materialist values are present - though not explicitly, as the practices remain engaged in the production of art objects. Traces of post-materialism’s shift toward prioritising social, political, and environmental concerns are discernible in the conceptual and intellectual registers of the artists. Political scientist, Ronald Inglehart characterises the emergence of post-materialist values in the late 1960s as “efforts to fight the dehumanising tendencies inherent in Industrial society... a fight against hierarchical relationships on both the domestic scene and in international politics.”¹⁵⁸ This ethos is evident at multiple levels within the practices examined, particularly in their interrogation of dominant hierarchies and epistemologies, both nationally and globally. The artists differ in tone - from Armanious’s ironic detachment to Carmody’s urgency, Upritchard’s wry fatalism, or Langdon-Pole’s reverent orchestration - but all reflect an acute awareness of the artist’s place within ecological and political entanglements. Many express scepticisms about art’s capacity to directly solve problems - Ward Knox is “critical of art’s power to effect change”¹⁵⁹ - yet they continue to practice in ways that model alternative value systems, with attention to localism and relationality. The broader implications of their work intersect with socially engaged art, institutional critique, and decolonial aesthetics; not overtly, but through material rigour, spatial attention, and ethical awareness. In this collective reflection, art is a shared terrain for attentiveness, where politics, ecology, and material form are understood as co-extensive.

Contemporary expressions of national identity increasingly acknowledge post-colonial and decolonial perspectives, offering models for other nations engaged in similar

¹⁵⁷ Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.

¹⁵⁸ Inglehart. *The Silent Revolution*, 285.

¹⁵⁹ Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.

processes of reckoning. Artists reflect and contribute to transnational conversations around First Nations sovereignty, inherited epistemologies, and the persistence of nationalist or imperialist frameworks. Through the lens of history, they navigate their inherited identities as both a lineage to engage with and a structure to unmoor from. The practices of Armanious, Langdon-Pole and Ward Knox remain locally situated yet globally engaged, whereas Newby and Upritchard are based in the northern hemisphere, they continue to draw deeply from their New Zealand heritage. What binds these artists is a shared tension between distance and proximity - distance from global centres or homelands, and proximity to formative cultural values and the experience of geographical isolation.

Chapter Two: Approaches and Methodologies

Contemporary artistic practice demands an increasingly interdisciplinary approach, where the convergence of material and idea reflects broader philosophical, cultural, and social concerns. In a social climate saturated with information relentlessly delivered via digital media and globalised systems of exchange, artists are using strategies that allow their work to remain open, adaptive, and critically engaged. This chapter examines key approaches that underpin the practices of the selected artists - relational thinking, rhizomatic research, interpolation, and creolisation. Artistic methodologies involve deliberate, often reflexive, strategies of making and thinking that allow for new forms of knowledge production. Relational thinking foregrounds the interconnectedness of elements across materials, histories, and contexts, while a rhizomatic approach favours a decentralised, networked mode of inquiry. Interpolation enables the insertion of disparate or heterogeneous elements into existing structures, encouraging the viewer to navigate meaning through tension and slippage. Creolisation, as theorised by Édouard Glissant, embraces cultural hybridity and transformation, offering a mode grounded in exchange, opacity, and multiplicity. These methodologies support porous, non-hierarchical approaches to practice, allowing artists to explore complex ideas while remaining grounded in material experimentation and exhibition-based inquiry. In unpacking these approaches, this chapter also gestures to broader questions of how artists engage with knowledge systems, including linguistic displacement, critical theory, and reflexive processes. Together, these methods reveal how contemporary art can be both analytically rigorous and intuitively responsive - capable of navigating the entangled realities of the present.

2.1 Relational Thinking, Errantry and Creolisation

Relational thinking is the skill of recognising and applying abstract, transferable connections. Originating in developmental science, it refers to the cognitive process of

identifying and integrating relationships, a capacity that develops throughout childhood and is fundamental to fluid intelligence and complex human reasoning.¹⁶⁰ In contemporary artistic practice, relational thinking sustains openness and interconnectedness, allowing artists to move across disciplines, histories, and materials. Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* (1990) offers a useful framework for understanding such approaches. First encountered through Langdon-Pole's reading list, this text has since become a generative reference within the development of this research. While grounded in Caribbean cultural identity and postcolonial thought, Glissant's theories resonate more broadly with relational forms of knowledge and expression in art. He introduces several key concepts - rhizomatic thought, errantry, creolisation, and the right to opacity - that describe how identity and culture are shaped through ongoing exchange and hybridity. He characterises *Relation* as a process that "senses, assumes, opens, gathers, scatters, continues, and transforms,"¹⁶¹ establishing parallels between the consciousness of self and the surrounding world - a vital aspect of artistic practice and experience. Glissant outlines two models of defining culture or identity, which are equally applicable to the articulation of concepts and the development of artistic voice. *Filiation* (or root identity) derives from linear, exclusionary narratives of origin that cast the Other as separate and often subordinate, necessitating assimilation or exclusion. By contrast, Glissant's notion of *Relation* posits identity as dynamic, transforming through continual interaction and exchange. Glissant illustrates this by drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's botanical metaphor of root versus rhizome¹⁶². Root identity is binary and

¹⁶⁰ Ariel Starr, Elena Leib, Jessica Younger, Project iLead Consortium, Melina Uncapher, and Silvia Bunge. "Relational Thinking: An Overlooked Component of Executive Functioning." *Developmental Science* 26, no. 3.

¹⁶¹ Édouard Glissant and Betsy Wing. *Poetics of Relation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997, 94-95.

¹⁶² The term rhizome originally refers to subterranean plant stems but was reinterpreted by philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) to describe non-hierarchical, dynamic multiplicities. Deleuze and Guattari contrast rhizomatic structures with traditional Western metaphysics, which favours hierarchical, tree-like models, critiquing disciplines like generative grammar and psychoanalysis for imposing rigid structures. The concept has since been applied to sociology and technology, particularly in analysing the Internet and social assemblages, offering an alternative to hierarchical or sign-centred interpretations of meaning and organisation.

exclusive, suppressing what surrounds it to propagate a single truth (a framework Glissant associates with the hegemonic structures of colonial discourse). In contrast, rhizomatic identity spreads outward, forming multiple, non-hierarchical connections. Glissant asserts, “Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other.”¹⁶³ Applied to artistic practice, this suggests that peripheral forces - social, cultural, historical, and conceptual - inform both the creation and reception of artwork, shaping the perspectives of artist and viewer alike. While this relational mode of inquiry has long been present in art, it remains significant to the artists examined in this research.

Many contemporary artists engage with this rhizomatic model, resisting fixed narratives in favour of openness and non-hierarchical interconnection. Langdon-Pole’s relational thinking is akin to celestial mapping, an approach he used to navigate both physical and conceptual terrains for his BMW Art Journey Prize in 2018. He embarked on a five-month expedition following the migratory patterns of birds and the celestial traditions of diverse cultures. His research spanned from the British Museum’s astronomical collections to the Marshall Islands, where he studied wave-piloting - a sophisticated indigenous navigation system that reads ocean currents, wind, and the positions of the stars. He describes celestial mapping as “ground zero of meaning-making and storytelling,”¹⁶⁴ a system through which civilisations have historically oriented themselves with the cosmos. For Langdon-Pole, celestial mapping is more than an act of wayfinding, it is a means of revealing historical entanglements and exposing the invisible forces that influence the movement of people, objects, and knowledge. His interest in migration extends beyond birds and celestial bodies to cultural and colonial histories, tracing the trajectories of artifacts as they traverse continents,

¹⁶³ Glissant. *Poetics of Relation*, 11.

¹⁶⁴ Nargess Banks. “Berlin-Based Artist Zac Langdon-Pole’s BMW Art Journey Takes Flight.” *Wallpaper*, 2019. <https://www.wallpaper.com/lifestyle/bmw-art-journey-zac-langdon-pole>.

institutions, and ideological frameworks. He interrogates scientific classification and trade networks by reconfiguring objects into assemblages. By tracing objects once displaced through colonialism, Langdon-Pole exposes the ways in which material culture is inextricably tied to migration, distortion, and reinterpretation. His use of celestial mapping becomes a conceptual tool for reconfiguring how we see the past, and by extension, how we position ourselves in the present.

Te Whanganui-A-Hei / Cooks Beach 12.06.2019 (fig.68) appears at first glance to depict a celestial sky, yet it is in fact a photogram of sand collected from Cooks Beach - a site inscribed with layered histories of cultural encounter and imperial ambition. In 1769, Captain James Cook anchored the *Endeavour* at this beach to observe the transit of Mercury and conduct ship repairs, marking the site as a pivotal point in British exploration and colonial expansion in the Pacific. The work plays with scale, magnifying (by 1000%) minuscule grains of sand to appear like distant stars, shifting geological material into a cosmic register. This resonates with William Blake's *Auguries of Innocence*, in which he writes:

To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.¹⁶⁵

This gesture not only conflates micro and macro but also reframes the historical narrative and its spatial and temporal dimensions. While Māori cosmologies locate ancestral presence in the stars (*whetū*), Langdon-Pole complicates this by suggesting that for many, the 'ancestors' gazing down are those tied to colonial arrival. In doing so, he recasts Cooks

¹⁶⁵ William Blake. *Auguries of Innocence*. Birmingham School of Printing, 1952.

Beach as a symbolic origin point of imperial presence, inscribed in both earthly matter and imagined skies.



Figure 68. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Te Whanganui-A-Hei / Cooks Beach 12.06.2019*, 2019. Sand photogram (1000% enlarged), made with sand from Te Whanganui-A-Hei / Cooks Beach, Aotearoa New Zealand. Archival Hahnemühle fine art print, 301.2 x 394cm.

Langdon-Pole's publication for the BMW Art Journey further illustrates his relational approach within practice. *Constellations I–XXIV* is a photographic series originally documented as field notes during the project and later published in his book *Constellations*. The images document his journey (geographically and conceptually) in a rhizomatic and inquisitively observant manner. There are mid-flight views of atolls Majuro and Upolu, the Pacific Ocean beating at their fragile borders, clouds hanging in the Earth's atmosphere beneath the artist's birds-eye view. There are images of shorelines and beach debris; photographs of specimens from the natural world such as xenophora shells, whale cross-sections or rare, double-headed animals. He splices images of observatory equipment,

celestial maps, and diagrams of meteorite orbit paths with captures of rainbows, macro images of a mechanical timepiece, beach tracks, and seabed fossils. There are shots of caterpillar-nibbled leaves, borer-ridden floorboards, or lush vistas into an ocean trench. There are high-altitude views of flying over the date line, and postage stamps from the Marshall Islands. Some images show crops of 17th Century paintings depicting birds or skulls, or 18th century etchings depicting stargazers and comet sightings.

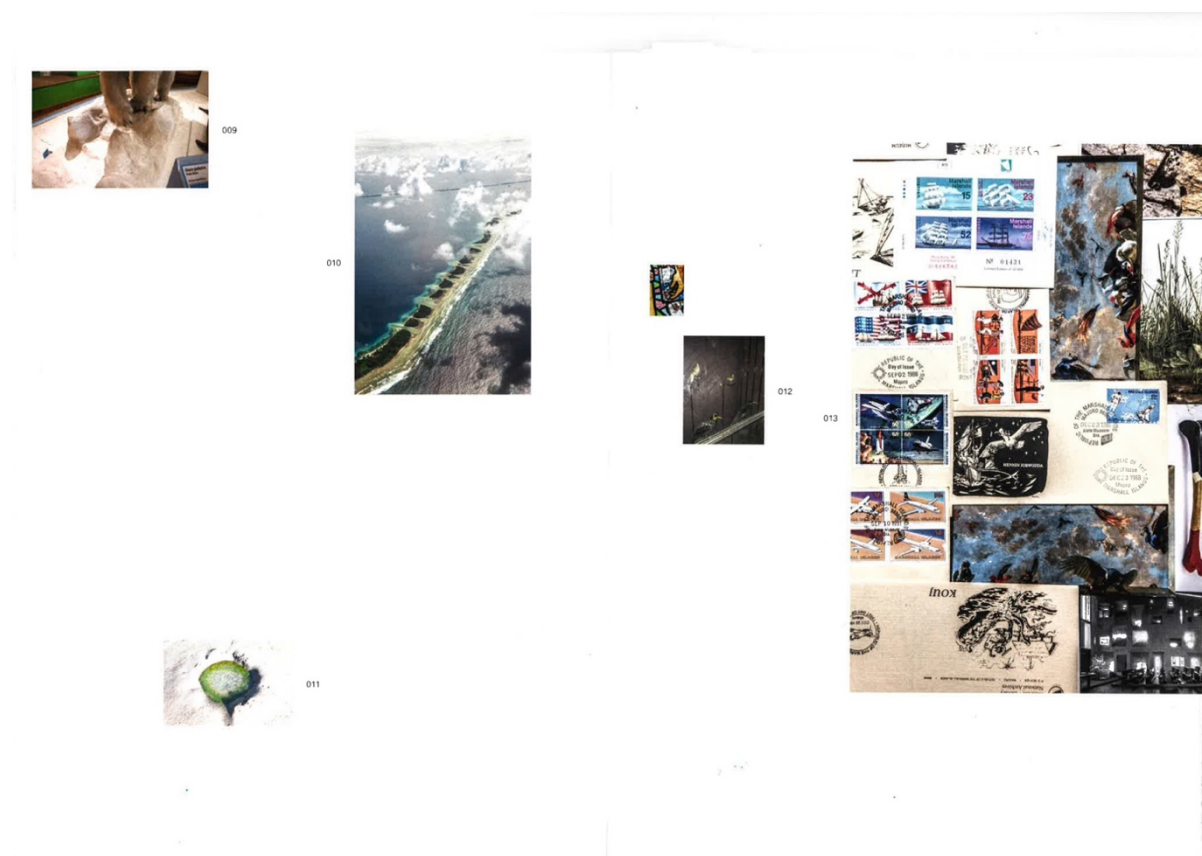


Figure 69. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Constellations*, from *Zac Langdon Pole's Art Journey: Constellations*, Hatje Cantz, 2019.

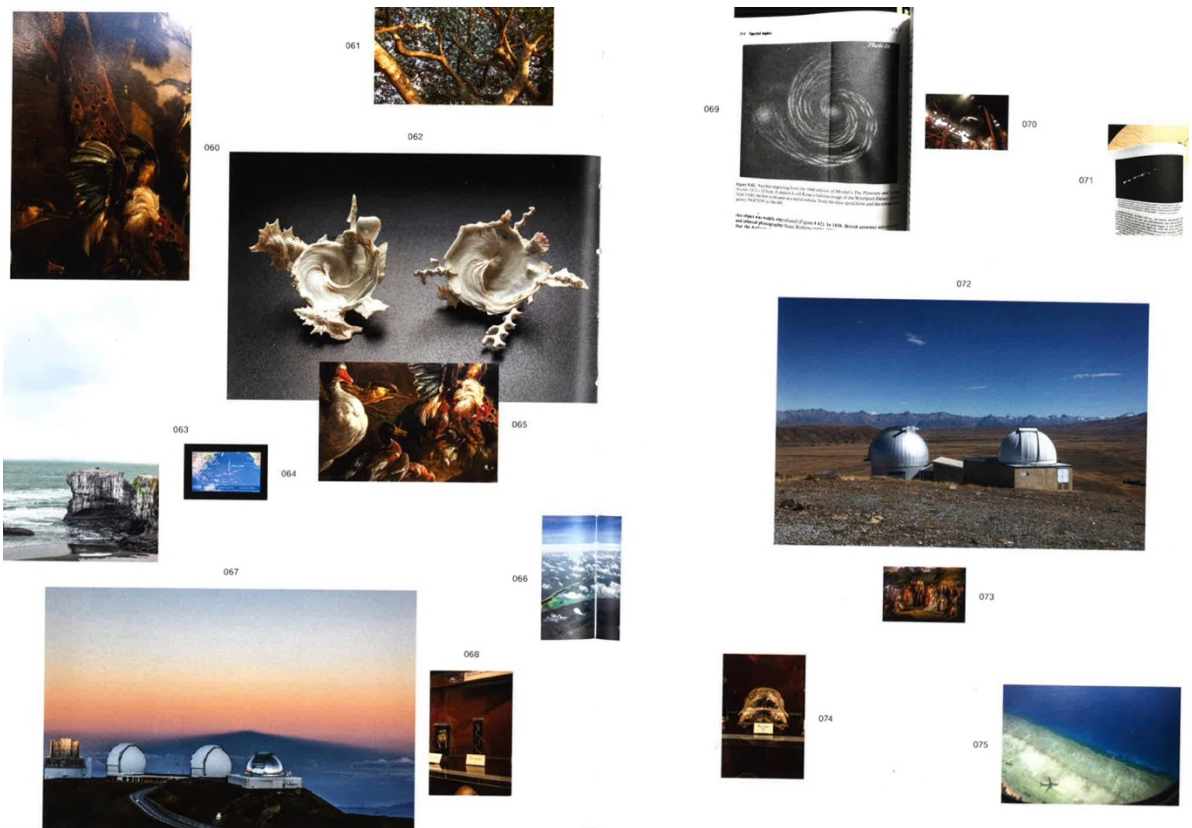


Figure 70. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Constellations*, from *Zac Langdon Pole's Art Journey: Constellations*, Hatje Cantz, 2019.



Figure 71. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Constellations*, from *Zac Langdon Pole's Art Journey: Constellations*, Hatje Cantz, 2019.

These visual fragments form a network of peripheral observations - constellations in their own right - that map the intuitive and research-driven pathways of Langdon-Pole's mind. "Whatever's at the centre of our attention and whatever is at its periphery is always interdependent,"¹⁶⁶ Langdon-Pole notes. His practice operates in this periphery, uncovering epistemologies, histories and connections through his rhizomatic, interpolating approach. Reiterating the concept of averted vision (to focus on the periphery of a faint object in order to see it more clearly), these indexical research images function as relational elements that clarify and contextualise the final body of work. Langdon-Pole reflects on the experiences of this research-based journey as "kaleidoscopic."¹⁶⁷ Recalling the recurring experience of European museums, where he was "exposed to the sheer breadth of encyclopaedic vision underpinned by the desire to map, classify, and systematically order the world."¹⁶⁸ The "megalomania of classification"¹⁶⁹ was profound for the artist, exposing the politics and limitations embedded in how we structure and understand knowledge. This taxonomic, museological framework stands in opposition to Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the rhizome, which advocates for non-hierarchical, non-linear structures of thought and organisation. Langdon-Pole's rejection of fixed classification systems may be seen as a catalyst for his adoption of a more rhizomatic approach, privileging multiplicity and lateral connections. The resulting works (figs 64, 68, 75, 103, 105, 195) emerge as hybrids, interweaving the artist's interests in natural history, cultural memory, ecological systems, and celestial navigation. One of the central insights from the project, he shares, was "to see multiple forms of mapping in relation to one another. This is how richer, more complex

¹⁶⁶ Tendai John Mutambu. "Zac Langdon-Pole: Lines of Flight." *Ocula*, 2019. <https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/zac-langdon-pole-lines-of-flight/>.

¹⁶⁷ Langdon-Pole. *Zac Langdon Pole's Art Journey*, 196.

¹⁶⁸ Langdon-Pole. *Zac Langdon Pole's Art Journey*, 196.

¹⁶⁹ Langdon-Pole. *Zac Langdon Pole's Art Journey*, 196.

stories and relationships to place can be formed.”¹⁷⁰ This recognition of relation becomes key to his practice, which privileges layered and multivalent connections to knowledge.

Fittingly, Langdon-Pole also has a relational approach to reading. He compiled a reading list to accompany his solo exhibition *Containing Multitudes* (2020), offering conceptual entry points into the exhibition. A glance at the list reveals links to the interpolated, rhizomatic and inquisitive nature of his practice. These texts not only illuminate Langdon-Pole’s thinking but also resonate with themes of interpolation, relation, and periphery/centre dynamics in contemporary art. Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan’s *Microcosmos* (1986) challenges the Darwinian emphasis on competition, professing that evolution is driven by symbiosis, a view aligned with Margulis’s Gaia hypothesis of Earth as a self-regulating system. Geoff Park’s *Ngà Uruora* (1995) examines Aotearoa’s river flatlands, blending Māori perspectives with ecological urgency. David Abram’s *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996) merges phenomenology, animism, and indigenous storytelling to explore the entanglement of human cognition and nature. Maggie Nelson’s *Bluets* (2009) interweaves philosophy, autobiography, and poetic fragments to meditate on blue as a lens. Kwame Anthony Appiah’s essay *There Is No Such Thing as Western Civilisation* (2016) dismantles the idea of a singular Western culture, arguing that values such as liberty and rational inquiry transcend any one tradition. A culture is not defined by values per se, but how they are expressed.

Just as Langdon-Pole adopts a relational ethos, Newby similarly employs walking and wandering as a methodology. Walking is her form of mapping, a method of attuning to the overlooked and unnoticed. “Walking is exercise; it’s restful, clarifying, practical, relaxing, versatile,”¹⁷¹ she reflects. “It’s also exposure to the world in a very simple way; you can learn

¹⁷⁰ Langdon-Pole. *Zac Langdon Pole’s Art Journey*, 196.

¹⁷¹ Newby. “Casualness”, 54.

small and large things.”¹⁷² This approach links to what Glissant terms *errantry*, a mode of knowledge formed through wandering and encounter. Unlike colonial exploration that sought domination, errantry is an open-ended movement that remains in relation to the Other at every moment. Errantry (including walking and mapping) is also present in contemporary artistic practices that embrace fluidity and transformation. Situated within both urban and natural environments, Newby’s installations embrace this fluidity, encouraging alternative ways of sensing space, refocusing on the incidental or contingent. Much of Newby’s work is embedded into the ground or inserted into peripheral spaces - locations that often go unnoticed unless encountered through wandering. Whether beneath one’s feet, high in a window corner, or integrated into architectural thresholds, her subtle gestures prompt an errant mode of viewing that mirrors her own process of movement and observation.

In *anything anything* (fig.72), installed at Klosterruine Berlin, Newby dug two meandering lines into the paved ground, inserting her own haptically-carved bricks to catch leaves, gravel, and feathers in their cavities. She links this embedded, tactile approach directly to her wandering: “It brings a connection to the ground and channels the act of walking.”¹⁷³

¹⁷² Newby. “Casualness”, 54.

¹⁷³ Duncan Ballantyne-Way. “Give and Take: Kate Newby on Her New Show at the Klosterruine.” *The Berliner*, 2024. <https://www.the-berliner.com/art/give-and-take-kate-newby-klosterruine/>.



Figure 72. Kate Newby, *anything, anything*, 2024-2025. Klosterruine Berlin, Germany.

Errantry and Relation advocate for an approach to culture and artistic practice that is non-hierarchical, consistently evolving through continual encounters with variation. The concepts of creolisation and interpolation offer dynamic methodologies through which meaning emerges from the fluid interplay of forms, ideas, and cultural entanglements. Creolisation is the dynamic and unpredictable blending of languages, cultures, and histories, resulting in hybrid forms of culture. It is a key concept in postcolonial discourse, and aids to resist assimilation and cultural hegemony while affirming multiplicity. This framework resonates with contemporary artistic practices that foreground material transformation, cross-cultural influence, and open-ended processes. Such dynamics are evident in Upritchard's frequent blending of references from real and imagined cultures, constructing layered narratives through both individual works and exhibition arrangements. Her consistent use of diverse materials drawn from various temporal, geographical, and cultural contexts manifests a creolised approach to sculptural production. *Any Noise Annoys an Oyster* (2024) featured

Upritchard’s characteristic blend of ceramic and glass vessels, textile sculptures, and balata and bronze figures, assembled through installation strategies that intersect craft and fine art. This deliberate collision of references - classical, spiritual, tribal, and museological - points to a recombinatory logic at the heart of her practice. Each vessel depicts a mythological narrative on its surface, referencing stories from various origins. Further mythological and imaginary figures such as dinosaurs, centaurs, and mermaids are rendered as figurative sculptures. Upritchard remarks that she imagines “aliens came down to earth and took things away but everything got mixed up on the way back,”¹⁷⁴ a metaphor that aptly captures her interest in disruption, recombination, and interpretive slippage. The interplay of material, scale, and narrative in her work articulates a form of cultural synthesis that remains open-ended.



Figure 72. Francis Upritchard, *Any Noise Annoys an Oyster*, 2024. Kunsthall Charlottenburg, Copenhagen, Denmark.

¹⁷⁴ “False Histories: On Francis Upritchard.” 2016, <https://www.megandunn.org/2016/06/28/false-histories/>.



Figure 73. Francis Upritchard, *Any Noise Annoys an Oyster*, 2024. Kunsthall Charlottenburg, Copenhagen, Denmark.

One work explicitly acknowledges its act of aesthetic borrowing. *Giacometti Looters* (fig.74) comprises five elongated, eyeless figures of varying scales, intertwined and leaning upon one another in a fragile, interdependent assemblage. The grouping evokes a sense of collective endurance - figures supporting, carrying, and relying on each other to move forward; or possibly looting the studio of Swiss sculptor Alberto Giacometti. The forms also echo the figures depicted in *Aotearoa* (fig.61). Perhaps both works are attempting to convey the wrangling of historical or cultural baggage on the artist's behalf. The title itself signals Upritchard's conscious appropriation, a self-aware nod to an art historical influence. As in much of her practice, these figures elude fixed interpretation, blending human, mythic, and cultural references into a creolised sculptural language.



Figure 74. Francis Upritchard, *Giacometti Looters*, 2024. Balata rubber, M8 steel in legs, 104 x 40 x 39cm.

2.2 Interpolation

Interpolation is a cross-disciplinary term, spanning fields from mathematics to music. Applied to art, it describes the synthesis of disparate or oppositional elements to generate meaning not only from the components themselves, but from the gaps and tensions between them. This capacity for bridging differences positions interpolation as a conducive method of artistic inquiry. Interpolation is employed most prominently by Langdon-Pole, yet it is also

evident in the work of Armanious, Upritchard and Newby. They converge in their shared use of interpolation and assemblage to disrupt conventional classifications, forging connections between disparate materials and revealing new meanings. Their practices juxtapose and recontextualise objects and language, revealing how established power structures influence our perception of authenticity and meaning.

Langdon-Pole's assemblages function as speculative archaeology. *Cleave Study* (fig.75) interrogates the tensions between attachment and separation, fusing a *Xenophora* shell (an organism that collects and affixes fragments from its environment) with a split anatomical model of a human tongue. The work embodies the duality of 'cleave' (meaning both to adhere and to sever) complicating notions of belonging, accumulation, and displacement. Between the accreted carrier shell and the clinical tongue model, viewers may interpolate themes of accumulation, dependency, community, and language. This hybrid object enacts a coalescence of natural and human orders, highlighting their reciprocal entanglement.



Figure 75. Zac Langdon Pole, *Cleave Study (ii)*, 2019. Anatomical human tongue cross-section, *Xenophora* shell, 10 x 5.5 x 9cm. Image source: <https://michaellett.com/exhibition/zac-langdon-pole-2/>

Langdon-Pole's *Translatio Studii* series (fig.76, 77, 89) features hybridised bowl forms constructed from fragments spanning ancient Greece and Rome, Islamic empires of the Middle Ages, and eighteenth-century Britain. *Translatio studii*, meaning 'the transfer of knowledge,' is a medieval historiographical concept that frames history as a sequential progression in which knowledge is passed from one region or era to the next. Closely related to *translatio imperii* (the idea of the transfer of imperial power), *translatio studii* maps the geographical and temporal shifts in centres of learning and intellectual influence. Langdon-Pole's gesture acknowledges that much of what is considered classical knowledge was lost in Europe during the Middle Ages and later revived during the Renaissance, largely due to its preservation and translation in Eastern libraries, where it was often rendered into Arabic before re-entering European discourse. The visible sutures in these works do not function as attempts at restoration but rather expose the fallacy of a singular, linear cultural origin. *Translatio Studii (No Such Thing as Western Civilisation)* (fig.76) clearly alludes to this intention through its title. Much of Langdon-Pole's work interpolates from the fields of science and history, domains in which objects are typically encountered through museums and textbooks. Viewers are pre-conditioned to extract meaning from such contexts and are invited to approach his work with the same interpretive gaze. In doing so, Langdon-Pole reactivates these forms and reorientates our attention, encouraging a critical eye.



Figure 76. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Translatio Studii (No such thing as Western Civilisation)*, 2020. Bowl fragments, brass staples: fragment details, (brown/red slip pottery shard): Ancient Greek / Cypriot c. 800-600 B.C.E; (black clay fragment): Scythian c. 100-500 A.D.; (blue/green/ purple glass): Roman, c. 4th-5th Century A.D.; (glazed calligraphic bowl- Kufic inscription: al mulk lillah 'Sovereignty is God's') Samanid Central Asia, 11th Century; (green glazed ceramic fragment): Bamiyan Islamic, 11th-12th Century A.D.; (blue and white porcelain): Liverpool, England c. 1785-95 A.D. 7.3 x 17.3 x 18.6cm.



Figure 77. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Re Translatio Studii (i)*, 2021. Fragment details: (brown/red slip pottery shard): Ancient Greek/Cypriot c. 600-800 B.C.E.; (black clay fragment): Scythian c. 100-500 A.D.; (blue/green/purple glass): Roman, c. 4th-5th Century A.D.; (beige/painted/glazed pottery fragment) Nishapur Islamic, 11th-12th Century A.D.; (green glazed ceramic fragment): Bamiyan Islamic, 11th-12th Century A.D.; (blue and white porcelain): Liverpool, England c. 1785-95 A.D. 25 x 9 x 9cm.

Titles also function as a form of interpolation, where artists use linguistic displacement to trigger conceptual slippage. Armanious' titles function as conceptual misdirection, echoing the paradoxical nature of his sculptures. He states, "there's no cynicism; it's all pretty earnest. Often the title is a big part of realizing the work. I don't really know what I'm making until I find the words to name it."¹⁷⁵ His works foreground the disjunction between language and object, paralleling the broader tension between thing and image. Naming becomes an act of framing - an attempt to fix interpretation - yet his works consistently resist such containment. For instance, *Flat Earth* (fig.78) - a backward-hung

¹⁷⁵ Misong Kim. "How to Make Stone Soup: Hany Armanious' Sculptural Repartees." *Ocula*, 2024. <https://ocula.com/magazine/insights/hany-armanious-stone-soup-henry-moore-institute/>.

replica of a painter's canvas, its cavity filled with sandy cement - challenges assumptions about perspective and exposes the labour behind artmaking.



Figure 78. Hany Armanious, *Flat Earth*, 2017. Pigmented polyurethane resin, 25.2 x 30 x 2 cm.

Carmody and Upritchard tend to employ titles as a tool for the viewer, hinting at the underlying narratives to be found in their work. Both Newby and Ward Knox frequently present titles in lowercase - a stylistic choice to remain casual, unmonumental, and conversational. Research¹⁷⁶ reveals that the decapitalisation in text aims to temper authority and formality, inviting an emotional connection. Newby's *try doing anything without it* issues a directive softened by its lack of capitals, while *YES TOMORROW* proclaims emphatic optimism through full uppercase. Similarly, Ward Knox's *fathom on fathoms* and *a deep and tumbling kind of laughter* distribute emphasis evenly, avoiding any hierarchy within title or

¹⁷⁶ Nyima. Jobe. "The Death of Capital Letters: Why Gen Z Loves Lowercase." *The Guardian*, 2025. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/feb/18/death-of-capital-letters-why-gen-z-loves-lowercase>.

work. Langdon Pole tends to remain porous and poetic in his titles, directing the viewer but not declaring the content entirely. Whether explicit, ambiguous, or ironic, titles function as interpretive cues that mediate the viewer's encounter with the work.

Interpolation and relational thinking allow for multiplicity rather than resolution, enabling artists to suggest ideas without fully disclosing them. This permits a right to opacity within their work, which affirms the value of ambiguity and resists the demand for transparency or singular meaning. The artists examined often produce multivalent works, encouraging the viewer to accept complexity as integral to meaning. In doing so, their practices extend beyond artistic forms to propose ethical and philosophical models for relating - to others, to knowledge, and to the world.

2.3 Thing and Image

Conceptual opacity also connects to how these artists navigate the space between object and image. By disrupting expectations, they prompt the viewer to oscillate between material presence and associative meaning - encountering the 'thingness' of the object while negotiating its representational charge. Many of the methodologies examined thus far serve not only as strategies for making but also as tools for generating meaning - an evolving, individualised process for both artist and viewer. Several of the artists adopt methodologies grounded in tacit awareness and deliberate engagement, distilling meaning from the indeterminate space between thing and image. A 'thing' must exist in the world, subject to gravity, time, and space. An 'image', by contrast, is unbound. It can exist purely in the mind, fluid and untethered. Yet despite their apparent opposition, object and image are inextricably linked. Thingness - rudimentarily defined by physicality and mass - constitutes the fabric of the world, and in this sense, precedes the image. Throughout art history, the categories of 'thing' and 'image' have often functioned as distinct binaries, particularly in the classification

of sculpture and painting. While the concept of the image is rooted in the experiential encounter with thingness, this section considers thing and image as both discrete and interdependent, unfolding in a state of mutual entanglement.

Armanious's practice articulates this with precision. His work foregrounds the slippage between fidelity and estrangement, formulating for the viewer an internalised image shaped by past experience. This is not merely visual, but a composite of sensory and cognitive associations - weight, texture, fragility, durability. Each new encounter is layered with these past impressions, so the object is never perceived as purely itself, but as a palimpsest of projections. Objects carry an intrinsic, often burdensome, weight of cultural and historical meaning. For artists, this presents a challenge; no object exists in isolation. It is always encountered in relation, its significance shaped by context. While some artists harness this relationality to elicit meaning through the viewer's encounter, it can also constrain interpretation, making it difficult to escape or transcend familiar associations. Armanious describes this gesture as "the effort in turning away from the shadows on the cave wall¹⁷⁷ to find not only the forms that create them but the light source beyond."¹⁷⁸

Armanious either replicates purely quotidian objects or constructs assemblages from shards and found detritus, which he then casts as singular sculptural forms. *Luminous Solution* (fig.79) exemplifies the former approach, depicting two used black paint-roller trays, their interiors scuffed and caked with dried paint residue. Such trays are typically associated with domestic renewal - the act of painting as a gesture of starting fresh. Through replication, Armanious reframes them as symbols of his own conceptual reset. The work gains further

¹⁷⁷ Plato's Allegory of the Cave, from *The Republic* (c. 380 BCE), describes prisoners who see only shadows cast on a wall and mistake them for reality. Upon escaping the cave and seeing the world in full light, one prisoner realizes the shadows were not what they appeared to be. The allegory powerfully conveys the concept of Idealism and offers a lasting metaphor that has guided philosophers for centuries in challenging superficial appearances and materialist views of reality.

¹⁷⁸ Armanious. "From Nothing", 47.

resonance in the context of exhibition-making, where freshly painted white walls often mark a ritualised transition between shows. In this sense, *Luminous Solution* functions as both an index of labour and an emblem of institutional and artistic renewal.



Figure 79. Hany Armanious, *Luminous Solution*, 2023. Pigmented polyurethane resin. 2 parts: 9 x 29.4 x 36.6 cm & 7.6 x 31 x 36.5cm.

These cast forms are not merely facsimiles but what Deleuze might call “repetitions that differ.”¹⁷⁹ They fix the object in a paradox of presence, where resemblance intensifies alienation. The act of replication displaces the object from the flux of everyday life, suspending it in an uncanny space between recognition and estrangement. This notion finds resonance in Maurice Blanchot’s concept of the ‘pure image’, which he describes as being revealed only in absence. Blanchot’s contemplation of the visage of a corpse - where death strips the person of their layered identity, leaving only their most essential ‘image’ behind - mirrors the way Armanious’s facsimile’s function. In their transformation into sculptural

¹⁷⁹ Gilles Deleuze. *Difference and Repetition*. London: Athlone Press, 1994.

forms the objects are reconstituted, emerging as spectral artifacts that transcend utility and temporality. “Both ‘thing’ and ‘image’ share similar qualities of detachment from their previous lives...show themselves as ‘linked to the elemental strangeness and to the formless weight of being, present in absence’.”¹⁸⁰

Other works, such as *Ikebana* (fig.80), *Reversible Jacket* (fig.92), and *Moths* (figs 81, 246-250) involve the deliberate assemblage of detrital materials into newly composed sculptural forms. In these works, Armanious exerts greater creative authorship over the construction of meaning, moving beyond straightforward replication. Unlike his cast replicas, which rely on the viewer’s estrangement and associative interpretation, these assemblages actively stage their own internal logic, foregrounding composition and juxtaposition.

Ikebana (fig.80) presents an assemblage of found components: a tall, rough-hewn block of sandstone, its surface marked by hacks and colourful crayon scribbles; a loose bundle of plastic or glass tubes resting lightly atop; and three small, doughy spheres surrounding the carved block. The entire composition sits on a coloured Perspex plinth, still wrapped in its protective film, from which a sickly neon green glow emanates through the corners. The title references the Japanese art of floral arrangement, evoking the formalisation of nature with equal attention to form and negative space. In this context, the arrangement privileges a relational balance, where the integrity of the whole exceeds the sum of its materials. The work blurs boundaries between readymade and reproduction, as well as object and support, revealing a conceptual and material sleight of hand.

¹⁸⁰ Armanious. “From Nothing”, 8.



Figure 80. Hany Armanious, *Ikebana*, 2013. Cast pigmented polyurethane resin, 152 x 50 x 40cm.



Figure 81. Hany Armanious, *Moth*, 2020. Pigmented polyurethane resin, gouache, 16 x 28.5 x 15cm.

These works displace the component's original identity, rendering it suspended within what Deleuze would describe as "groundlessness"¹⁸¹ - a chaotic field that "swarms"¹⁸² with differences, defying fixed relations between terms. The act of replication in Armanious's work generates difference. It introduces a delay or deferral in how meaning coheres, suspending the viewer in the swarm of resemblance and difference, inviting recursive attention. Deleuze's notion of chaos - filled with "infinitesimal vectors"¹⁸³ that resist consistency - resonates with the perceptual and conceptual terrain Armanious cultivates. These objects remain ontologically unsettled, refusing integration and embodying a sense of antagonism.

Armanious's process merges the conceptual detachment of the readymade with the material precision of *trompe-loiel*, suspending objects in an ambiguous space between

¹⁸¹ Deleuze. *Difference and Repetition*.

¹⁸² Deleuze. *Difference and Repetition*.

¹⁸³ Deleuze. *Difference and Repetition*.

recognition and estrangement. This process aligns with Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation, which suggests that the copy does not reference an original but instead replaces it, destabilising any fixed notion of reality.¹⁸⁴ "The thingness that is revealed by the facsimile object tells us more about the object than the object itself."¹⁸⁵ Thus mimetic reproduction is not about imitation, but revelation. By severing objects from their original identity, its newfound state of suspended meaning is revealed. The act of replication does not reference reality but replaces it. Armanious shares "It's weird to replicate objects as three-dimensional things, but in a sense, they become images. I think it speaks more to painting than it does to sculpture, even though they're 3D physical things. It's all about image. It's only image."¹⁸⁶ Any work that activates the viewer's perceptual terrain hovers at the threshold of comprehension. For some viewers, the encounter may not extend beyond the object (or thing), its quotidian or banal associations, or the apparent simplicity of Armanious's gesture. For others, it may act as a catalyst, prompting a shift in perceptual register and inviting a renewed way of apprehending the world.

The act of reproduction as a conceptual tool is deeply embedded in art history, particularly through *trompe-l'œil*, a technique that does not merely imitate reality but questions the limits of perception itself. Armanious's work, like *trompe-l'œil* painting, relies on an unsettling slippage between illusion and presence. This strategy recalls the high-fidelity simulacra of Fischli and Weiss, whose work de-names and un-identifies objects in order to gain new understanding. Their meticulous facsimiles - such as *Untitled* (fig.82), *Untitled (Rotterdam)* (fig.83), and *Vase* (fig.84) - amplify the ordinary into realms of reverence. Boris Groys writes "They reproduce a pre-scientific, pre-philosophical world that deals with only two things: what we see with our eyes and, as additional information, how what we see with

¹⁸⁴ Jean Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.

¹⁸⁵ Armanious. "From Nothing", 8.

¹⁸⁶ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

our eyes has been created out of nothingness.”¹⁸⁷ Armanious adds to this perspective, professing “the more banal the feature, the more revelatory.”¹⁸⁸ The sculptural facsimile exceeds the representational and becomes a transcendental vestige.



Figure 82. Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Untitled*, 1994-2013. Painted polyurethane, 164 parts, dimensions variable.

¹⁸⁷ Boris Groys. “Simulated Readymades.” *Parkett* 40/41 (1994), 33.

¹⁸⁸ Armanious. “From Nothing”, 38.



Figure 83. Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Untitled (Rotterdam)*, 1993. Hand-carved and painted polyurethane, 59 parts, dimensions variable.



Figure 84. Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *Vase*, 1986-87. Cast rubber, 38 x 15 x 6 cm.

Upritchard also toys with what she calls “slippery politics”¹⁸⁹, where her practice oscillates between mediums, forms, and scales to represent both re-imagined figures and their narratives. Her works cross-pollinate between cultures and references (akin to creolisation), simultaneously reflecting and critiquing the institutions that collect, preserve, and assign value to such objects and their histories. This discomfort is integral to her practice, as her figures occupy an uneasy space between cultural memory and material estrangement. Upritchard’s sculptures also interrogate the fallibility of memory. The threshold space

¹⁸⁹ Anthony Byrt. “Francis Upritchard: City Gallery Wellington.” *Artforum International* 55, no. 3 (2016): 303.

between reality and memory holds a similar dichotomy to thing and image. Her hybrid forms - part human, part animal, part mythological - exist within a floating, speculative history. Her consistent use of dinosaur forms - a consistent theme in *Surf 'n' Turf* (fig.85) - exemplifies this. She shares, “The longer I make dinosaurs, the further away from reality I’m sure they get. I like this because I think we’re wrong about pretty much everything. To go down an incorrect path is a fun system for me.”¹⁹⁰



Figure 85. Francis Upritchard, *Surf 'n' Turf*, 2022. Installation view, Kate MacGarry, London.

She probes the constructed nature of history, the limits of preservation, and the shifting terrain of cultural narratives. This manifests as a “faux-museological hallucination,”¹⁹¹ where the viewer encounters an assemblage of distorted artifacts, ambiguous references, and critiques of cultural appropriation. Art writer and critic Anthony Byrt observes, “Upritchard clearly [takes] a swipe at the way we convince ourselves that our need to preserve, collect, and possess is something nobler than straight-up avarice.”¹⁹² Byrt

¹⁹⁰ Charlottenburg, Kunsthall. “Francis Upritchard: Any Noise Annoys an Oyster.” 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5fKz5851B4>.

¹⁹¹ Byrt. “Francis Upritchard: City Gallery Wellington.”, 303.

¹⁹² Byrt. “Francis Upritchard: City Gallery Wellington.”, 303.

extends this critique, questioning the commodification of cultural artifacts in her work: “Given her objects’ indexical relationship with real artifacts and high-end furniture, are they just as covetable and easily consumable for her twenty-first-century patrons as their original models were for the earlier collectors and museums she (possibly) critiques?”¹⁹³ This is a valid observation, one that frequently informs my own practice. Does a work’s resemblance to a functional object maintain its entanglement with notions of commodification, objectification, and by extension, systems of commerce and capitalism; now expanded beyond utility to encompass status, prestige, and celebrity? How can art objects transcend this connotation? This is a constant internal debate when dealing with making things or objects. Ward Knox shares a similar sentiment, “in my early twenties I found it hard to hold onto my personal beliefs and also operate within the hyper capitalism of the commodified art market.”¹⁹⁴

Unlike Armanious, whose mimetic manoeuvre suspends objects in fixed states of replication, Upritchard’s work navigates a space where meaning remains in flux. Her practice engages with postcolonial discourse on appropriation, the ethics of display, and the constructed nature of history. Yet rather than offering a direct critique, she complicates these narratives through ambiguity and material play. Moving between the real and the imagined, the archival and the invented, her work prompts a perceptual negotiation, where the boundaries between thing and image continue to shift, unsettled and open-ended.

A central consideration in making and exhibiting work is the viewer’s perceptual conditioning. What knowledge does the viewer bring to the work? What assumptions do they hold about materials, forms, and scales? Every individual carries a unique set of references and cognitive biases, shaped by personal experience, cultural background, and exposure to

¹⁹³ Byrt. “Francis Upritchard: City Gallery Wellington.”, 303.

¹⁹⁴ Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.

different artistic and material traditions. While it is impossible and perhaps undesirable for an artist to fully anticipate or control the viewer's interpretive framework, it is an interesting dynamic to consider. Many artists deliberately engage with this fluidity, offering forms that seem clear and familiar yet ultimately expose the instability of perception. Such works challenge the viewer's memory, disrupt epistemologies, and expose the fragile nature of what we believe to be true or fixed. The gap between thing and image is where this conceptual tension resides. In this liminal space, the viewer encounters not just the object itself, but the mind's own mechanisms of projection and recognition. This is where meaning is activated. An artwork then is not just an object but a mirror of the viewer's own cognitive processes - if they are willing to recognise it.

This chapter has traced how contemporary artists mobilise methodologies such as relational thinking, interpolation, creolisation, and the interplay of thing and image to generate meaning through entanglement, rather than resolution. In resisting certainty and epistemological closure, these approaches reflect the complexity of contemporary existence. They emphasise hybridity, ambiguity, and reflexivity, foregrounding process over product and relation over hierarchy. Whether through relational and rhizomatic thinking, interpolation, or tactile forms of errantry, these methodologies open conceptual and perceptual space for new knowledge to emerge. Artistic practice is a mode of inquiry that reconfigures how both artists and viewers engage with material, culture, and the world.

Chapter Three: Site & Assemblage

3.1 Assemblage & Installation Art

Assemblage, as a method and conceptual framework, underpins much of contemporary sculptural and installation practice. It offers a model for working with material and conceptual multiplicity, where objects and gestures are gathered, sometimes juxtaposed, and often recontextualised. The artists examined in this thesis all employ assemblage strategies in some form as ways of engaging with questions of material agency, cultural narrative, and spatial encounter. In this expanded view, one might consider every exhibition an assemblage, where a provisional composition of materials and ideas are activated through context and relational meaning. Importantly, Installation Art prioritises spatial relationships, location and the viewer's embodied experience - distinguishing it from (yet still conceptually linked to) Assemblage.

Jane Bennett's theory of assemblage, articulated in *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things* (2010), provides a valuable framework for reconsidering material interactions in artistic practice. Bennett challenges the dichotomy of brute, inert matter and active subjectivity, instead proposing the concept of "vital materiality,"¹⁹⁵ wherein objects possess their own forms of agency and vitality. She professes "the capacity of things - edibles, commodities, storms, metals - to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own."¹⁹⁶ In Bennett's view, assemblages are "living, throbbing confederations [composed of] energies that confound them from within."¹⁹⁷ Such groupings are not governed by hierarchy or singular authorship but by emergent properties generated through interaction. Mark Bonta and John Protevi, in *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*, define an

¹⁹⁵ Jane Bennett. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* Duke University Press, 2010, vii.

¹⁹⁶ Bennett. *Vibrant Matter*, viii.

¹⁹⁷ Bennett. *Vibrant Matter*, 24.

assemblage as “an intensive network or rhizome displaying consistency or emergent effect by tapping into the ability of the self-ordering forces of heterogeneous materials to mesh together.”¹⁹⁸ They further explain that “each member-actant maintains an energetic pulse slightly ‘off’ from that of the assemblage... never a stolid block but an open-ended collective, a ‘non-totalizable sum.’”¹⁹⁹ This description resonates with the conceptual logic of installation and assemblage art, where the artwork comes into being through the interplay of intention and response. In the practices explored in this research, the pulse of each ‘member-actant’ can be sensed. Each object, material, or gesture vibrates in relation to those around it, enmeshed in a sentient and responsive constellation, most frequently within an exhibition.

Bennett’s materialism signals a move away from the romanticised notion of the autonomous artist-genius. (However, it is important to note that many artists and institutions continue to perpetuate this model, even when working with assemblage or installation-based approaches.) Instead, the artist is one participant in a dynamic network of actants which includes tools, surfaces, environments, and even climate conditions, all influencing the artwork’s formation. A kiln, a rope, a shell, a metal crucible, or a lump of clay might all exert pressures and affordances that exceed the artist’s intentions. Newby reflects this sentiment, stating “Most of my work needs special attention. It needs weather, circumstance. The tiles need rain and the wind chimes need wind. They’re always changing. What’s a puddle if it’s not outside in the rain? A-bird shat on my roofing tiles in Portland, which is great. What a success!”²⁰⁰ This relational view of matter diffuses ideas of control and authorship, inviting a deeper recognition of the collaborative vitality of materials.

¹⁹⁸ Mark Bonta and John Protevi. *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004, 54.

¹⁹⁹ Bonta and Protevi. *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*, 54.

²⁰⁰ Simonini. “An Interview with Kate Newby.” 36-41.



Figure 86. Kate Newby, *The having seems great (detail)*, 2018. Assorted clay, glass wood, 275 x 345 x 35cm.

Langdon-Pole's *Concatenations* (figs 87&88) exemplifies an assemblage that foregrounds the actant agency of each component in relation to the whole. Materials in the work include iron meteorite dust, magnets, murex shell, quartz, an axe head, a typewriter, a community centre stool, an antique microscope case, a banded jasper 'meat stone', a 'Last Rites' Catholic idolatry box, and a neoclassical style capital buck mould. Organic and geological materials rest atop box-like, architectural, man-made forms, creating a subtle tension between natural order and human imposition. The placement suggests a tipping point, where human structures threaten to disrupt the balance of the natural world. Central to the composition is a bronze axe head, a charged object historically linked to deforestation, industrialisation, and colonial expansion. Positioned between the organic and the constructed, it reads as a pivot - perhaps even the origin - of this imbalance. Crucially, the assemblage evokes meaning through the interrelation of these objects. They would not hold the same conceptual or affective weight if they were displayed individually. Langdon-Pole's intentional juxtaposition of disparate materials activates the layered histories carried within them, constructing a work that signifies the convergence of temporal, cultural, and material forces.



Figure 87. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Concatenations*, 2022. Iron meteorite dust, magnets, murex shell, quartz, bronze socketed axe head (Luristan, Iron Age, ca. 1000-650 BCE), Blickensderfer typewriter case (ca. 1897), gymnasium/community centre stool, antique microscope case, banded jasper 'Meat Stone', 'Last Rites' Catholic idolatry box (1897), neoclassical/Corinthian style capital buck mould, 154 x 44 x 44cm.



Figure 88. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Concatenations (detail)*, 2022. Iron meteorite dust, magnets, murex shell, quartz, bronze socketed axe head (Luristan, Iron Age, ca. 1000-650 BCE), Blickensderfer typewriter case (ca. 1897), gymnasium/community centre stool, antique microscope case, banded jasper 'Meat Stone', 'Last Rites' Catholic idolatry box (1897), neoclassical/Corinthian style capital buck mould, 154 x 44 x 44cm.

Contextual variations will lend themselves to a myriad of outcomes too, particularly through assemblage or installation. For example, in his *Porous World* (2022), Langdon-Pole presents *Translatio Studii (Revisited)* (fig.89), a small bowl comprised of stitched fragments from ancient history, alongside a series of large works, comprised of assembled puzzle pieces

(figs 90&91). Both approaches pull reference and direct associations from ancient culture and art history yet are assembled in rudimentary and unexpected fashions. His approach for these works mirrors the Japanese tradition of *kintsugi*²⁰¹, in which broken ceramics are repaired with gold, to reveal its fractures and pay homage to its material life. However, Langdon-Pole's attempts at repair seem harsh and exposed, underscoring the violence and displacement embedded in these material histories. The fragments and pieces evident in the works pull the viewer into a vortex of civilisation, colonisation, and globalisation. Langdon-Pole shares: "one of the main motivations for me in making these works is to provide a space for unknowing, for the possibility and pliability of how reality is always a 'many ways' street."²⁰²



Figure 89. Langdon-Pole, Zac. *Translatio Studii (Revisited)*. 2022. Bowl fragments, brass staples, 127 x 253 x 253mm.

²⁰¹ *Kintsugi* (Japanese): the Japanese technique of repairing broken pottery with lacquer mixed with gold, silver, or platinum, visibly honouring rather than concealing the object's fractures. It embodies a philosophy that values imperfection, resilience, and the history held within repair.

²⁰² Zac Langdon-Pole. Instagram, 2023. https://www.instagram.com/p/Cz5tXkYLKHJ/?img_index=1.

Exhibited alongside large-scale reconstructed puzzles, these works engage in a dialogue of recomposition. The fractured ceramic fragments contrast with the precision of the puzzle assemblages, which seamlessly merge disparate imagery - celestial NASA Hubble telescope photographs with 19th century Romantic landscape paintings, composed through positive and negative forms to evoke a Mooney image cognitive test - into a coherent visual and conceptual plane. This layering foregrounds the processes of fragmentation, alignment, and coalescence, prompting reflection on the ways meaning is generated through the reassembly of cultural and cosmological references. The exhibition exemplifies Langdon-Pole's approach to assemblage and relational thinking across multiple scales, an ethos that recurs throughout his practice.



Figure 90. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Porous World*, 2022. Installation view, Michael Lett, Auckland.



Figure 91. Zac Langdon-Pole, *The Dog God Cycle (detail)*, 2022.

Engaging the register of the everyday, Armanious's *Reversible Jacket* (fig.92) depicts a plastic file, two empty glasses with a lightbulb poised between them, all atop a coloured Perspex plinth which is still yet to be unwrapped. It is easy to overlook that each of these objects are all meticulously cast in pigmented resin; they are not the actual objects. Although the work appears to be an inanimate composition, the assemblage hints at an active energy. The file and the glasses, both empty, suggest a lack of content or nourishment in the work. But the lightbulb implies a connecting charge between the glasses, as if on the verge of activation or combustion. The plinth itself is part of the work, a cast facsimile of a coloured

Perspex box fabricated for the artist. This component remains in its state of revealing and concealing, an apt metaphor for Armanious's broader practice.



Figure 92. Hany Armanious, *Reversible Jacket*, 2013. Cast pigmented polyurethane resin, 155 x 50 x 40cm.

In the same exhibition, *Smokers* (figs 93&94) may be read as a precedent to Langdon-Pole's *Concatenations* (fig.88). It adopts a similar vertical structure, appears to incorporate quartz, and displays a sense of imbalance. Armanious props the protective casing of the geological specimen ajar, suggesting through both form and title that something vaporous, perhaps vital, is escaping. Is Armanious suggesting that nature should not be isolated from art and life, but allowed to seep into the ordered rigidity of the world? Or does the propped case that sits atop a glue-stained slab of polystyrene dispel any harmony and propose there is only a slight chance left before we cut off the vitality of the natural world? The title *Smokers* may evoke past shifts in public policy (such as the regulation of smoking in enclosed and public spaces for the sake of collective health), prompting the question: could similar decisive action be taken toward environmental conservation?



Figure 93. Hany Armanious, *Smokers*, 2013. Pigmented polyurethane resin, 132 x 46 x 60cm.



Figure 94. Hany Armanious, *Smokers (detail)*, 2013. Pigmented polyurethane resin, 132 x 46 x 60cm.

Critically, the implications of assemblage extend beyond material agency into questions of socio-political and economic critique. In *The System of Objects* (1968), Jean Baudrillard argued that everyday objects, when collected and displayed, become signifiers of identity and power in consumer culture.²⁰³ Assemblage art operates within (and often in tension with) systems of consumption and fetishisation. Installation using found or discarded objects can both reflect and resist the commodification of art. Armanious is both disillusioned and enchanted by consumerism, observing object-commodities and “their force as a sensuous presence or as a metaphysical presence... the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems.”²⁰⁴ His practice can be seen as an attempt to escape the saturated vitality of the objects he casts, instead replenishing their pulse and reshaping our perception of them through recontextualised scenes. Assemblage exposes and amplifies these systems of perception, making viewers aware of how objects circulate and accrue meaning.

Bourriaud also links assemblage and participatory art to a broader critique of capitalism. He asserts that contemporary artists use found materials to construct social experiences that mimic commercial exchange. Bourriaud argues that “artistic activity is a game, whose forms, patterns, and functions develop and evolve according to periods and social contexts; it is not an immutable essence.”²⁰⁵ Assemblage becomes a metaphor for meaning-making in an era of commercialised experience. Some artists and critics view assemblage and installation art as a reclamation of objects from consumer culture (such as Mike Kelley, Sterling Ruby, Sarah Sze), while others reinforce the seductive strategies of commercial display and commodification in their works (such as Simon Denny, Jeff Koons, Yayoi Kusama).

²⁰³ Jean Baudrillard. *The System of Objects*. Radical Thinkers ; 3. London: Verso, 2005.

²⁰⁴ Armanious. “From Nothing”, 41.

²⁰⁵ Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics.*, 11.



Figure 95. Mike Kelley, *Deodorized Central Mass with Satellites*, 1991/1999. Plush toys sewn over wood and wire frames with Styrofoam packing material, nylon rope, pulleys, steel hardware and hanging plates, fiberglass, car paint, and disinfectant, dimensions variable.



Figure 96. Sarah Sze, *Triple Point (Observatory)*, 2013. Mirrors, photograph of rock printed on Tyvek, wood, aluminium, metal, mixed media, dimensions variable. Installation view, Biennale di Venezia, 2013.



Figure 97. Simon Denny, *Remainder 2*, 2019. Margaret Thatcher scarves, Patagonia 850 down sleeping bag 30 F/-1 C - R parts, ripstop nylon, down sourced from second hand San Francisco garments, carbon fibre, glass fibre, wood, 210 x 55 x 40cm.

Installation art similarly decentres the viewer, where a space is conceived as a totalised entity, one that incorporates objects, viewers, light, sound, and atmosphere into a unified perceptual and conceptual whole. Installation art emerged from the immersive environments created by artists such as Allan Kaprow from the late 1950s onward, though earlier precedents exist - most notably Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbau* (1933) (fig.98), an evolving installation within his Hannover home constructed from found materials including newspapers, driftwood, furniture, and mirrors. *Merzbau* has been described as “a palimpsest of metonymic objects.”²⁰⁶ From the 1960s, installation developed into a significant strand of modern art, gaining further momentum in the early 1990s following the late-1980s art market crash, which prompted renewed interest in conceptual practices.

²⁰⁶ Claire Bishop. *Installation Art: A Critical History*. London: Tate, 2005, 42.



Figure 98. (left) Kurt Schwitters, *Merzbau*, 1933. (right) reconstruction by Peter Bissegger 1981-1983.

At the core of Installation art lies an emphasis on the viewer's embodied experience, as well as the refusal of the autonomous art object. It foregrounds physical presence, sensory immersion, and spatial navigation. It is at times ephemeral and contingent, and demands a kinaesthetic mode of engagement, where the viewer must move, listen, smell, feel, and sometimes even participate directly. As Bishop articulates in *Installation Art: A Critical History*, the “the literal presence of the viewer is arguably the key characteristic,”²⁰⁷ and it is this insistence on co-presence that marks installation as distinct from other visual media. Bishop observes “the associational value of found materials - which had been used in the 1960s and 1970s to connote ‘everyday life’ - were by the 1980s harnessed for their sensuous immediacy, but as a way in which to subvert our ingrained responses to the dominant

²⁰⁷ Bishop. *Installation Art*, 6.

repertoire of cultural meanings. This strategy remains the prevailing mode of articulating ideas in contemporary installation art.”²⁰⁸

The interplay between matter and meaning draws attention to the broader phenomenological frameworks that underpin installation art. Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) was particularly influential in shifting artistic discourse toward embodied perception. Rejecting the Cartesian dualism of mind and body²⁰⁹, Merleau-Ponty posited that subject and object are interdependent, noting, “the thing is inseparable from a person perceiving it... It stands at the other end of our gaze or at the terminus of a sensory exploration which invests it with humanity.”²¹⁰ Minimalist artists such as Robert Morris took up this idea in sculptural terms, creating works where meaning emerged from the viewer’s physical interaction with scale, material, and site. In *Notes on Sculpture 2* (1966), Morris emphasised the relationship between a viewer’s body and the scale of an object, where human-sized works prompted a heightened mode of perception, situated between intimacy and monumentality. Responding to Minimalism were the artists of the Light and Space movement that emerged on the American West Coast in the 1960s and 1970s. Artists such as Robert Irwin, James Turrell (fig.99), and Nancy Holt (fig.100) directed their concerns away from Minimalism’s critical discourse on objecthood, focusing on perceptual abstraction and the ephemerality of sensory experience. Eschewing material form in favour of installations composed of light, space, and atmosphere, they sought to decentre the viewer through disorientation and perceptual recalibration.

²⁰⁸ Bishop. *Installation Art*, 41.

²⁰⁹ Pertaining to René Descartes’ (17thC, French) philosophy: mind-body dualism which separates immaterial thought from the material body. Often critiqued for privileging the rational, observing individual over an embodied, relational experience. Descartes stated *Cogito, ergo sum*: ‘I think, therefore I am’.

²¹⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Donald A. Landes. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Abingdon, Oxon Routledge, 2012, 320.



Figure 99. James Turrell, *City of Arhirit*, 1976.



Figure 100. Nancy Holt, *Sun Tunnels*, 1973-76. Great Basin Desert, Utah. Concrete, (4 parts) 275 x 550 x 275cm each.

I first encountered the concept of viewer conditioning²¹¹ through the work and writings of Robert Irwin. His work at Dia: Beacon exemplifies this concept, where the journey to the museum site (its surrounding landscape, the passage of time) functions as a preliminary perceptual reset before engaging with the artworks. In *Re-shaping the Shape of Things: the myth of the artist* (1972), Irwin writes,

What we see is what we seek to see, compounded by a collective, historical consciousness, and the things we make are reasonable extensions of this consciousness. This includes how we selectively see those things we have made. The act of art has turned to a direct examination of our perceptual processes. Since things are extensions of our concepts of what we think things should be, perception, rather than seeing, is essentially held to the shape of the concepts we hold for ourselves.

²¹¹ Viewer conditioning refers to the influence of prior experience, knowledge, and expectation on the perception of artwork - shaped by immediate circumstances (weather, time, mood) as well as broader factors such as formal education or personal bias.

Seeing has been held to the constant attempt to affirm our conceptual ideas of reality.²¹²



Figure 101. Irwin, Robert. *Excursus: Homage to the Square*³, 1998/2015. Synthetic fabric, paint, wood, fluorescent light, polyester gels, and natural light.

A similar concern with decentering informs poststructuralist accounts of the viewer. Art historian Erwin Panofsky, in his analysis of Renaissance perspective, argued that the vanishing point reinforced a rational, Cartesian subject at the centre of the visual field. This centred viewer was both the measure and the master of the world depicted. Twentieth-century artists, especially those influenced by feminist, postcolonial, and psychoanalytic theory, sought to disrupt this model by multiplying viewpoints and fragmenting stable positions of spectatorship. Installation Art denies the viewer any single vantage point due to its expansive and immersive nature.

Bishop notes art's movement towards "mimetic engulfment"²¹³, where immersive environments absorb the viewer, blurring subject-object boundaries and diminishing critical

²¹² Robert Irwin. *Notes toward a Conditional Art*. Edited by Matthew Simms. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011, 54.

²¹³ Bishop. *Installation Art*, 82.

distance. Through scale, disorientation, and sensory intensity, such environments evoke a heightened form of embodied knowledge that transcends visibility. The work of James Turrell and Yayoi Kusama are prime examples of ‘mimetic engulfment’. Although such immersion is not central to the artists discussed in this research, it is a key consideration that they must encounter when creating assemblages with artworks and objects.



Figure 102. Yayoi Kusama, *The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away*, 2013. Wood, metal, glass mirrors, plastic, acrylic panel, rubber, LED lighting system, acrylic balls, water, 288 x 415 x 415cm.

In his own gesture of mimetic engulfment, Langdon-Pole's *Paradise Blueprint* (2017) (figs 103&104) presents historical misapprehensions through cyanotype prints of Bird of Paradise legs, arranged into a hypnotic, wallpaper-like pattern. This work references European naturalists' false belief that these birds (which were traded without feet) lived perpetually in flight; an exoticized projection encompassed by both wonder and violence. The wrapping of the gallery walls in this visual could metaphorically evoke the idea that one

remains wrapped or cocooned in their entrenched belief systems, carrying this into each new encounter.



Figure 103. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Paradise Blueprint*, 2017. Installation view, Ars Viva, 2018.

Langdon-Pole's *Tomb(e)* (2016) (fig.105) repositions a taxidermized (and legless) Bird of Paradise inside a sealed bank vault. Viewers could only observe the specimen through a glass threshold, reinforcing its inaccessibility and perhaps echoing the distance often maintained from such mythologies. This installation collapses the distinctions between natural and cultural knowledge, highlighting how in this instance, the lack of human knowledge led to the formation of a long-believed myth.



Figure 155. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Paradise Blueprint (detail)*, 2017.

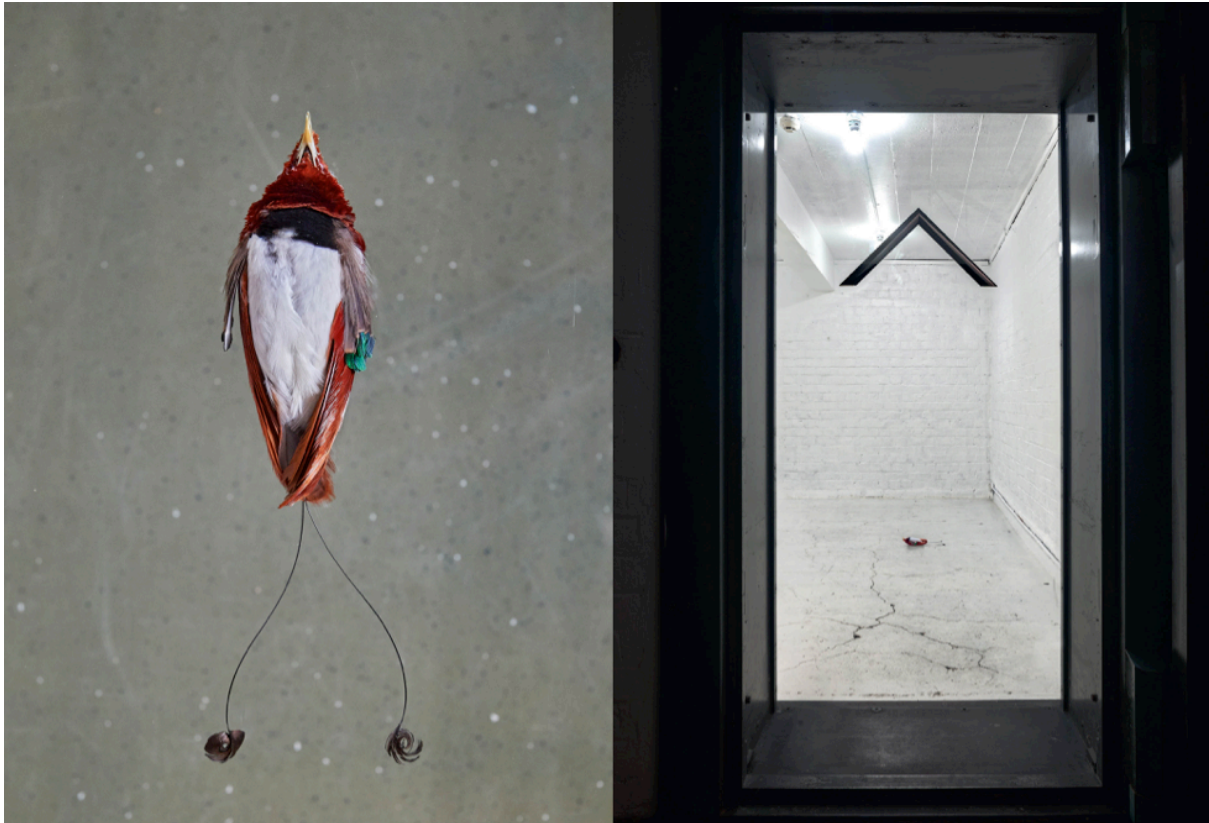


Figure 105. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Tomb(e)*, 2016. Installation view, Michael Lett, Auckland.

Assemblage - as both methodology and conceptual logic - provides a generative framework through which these artists explore material agency, spatial encounter and cultural entanglement. In the practices examined, assemblage and installation operate as relational modes that foreground the pulse of materials, the vitality of context, and the perceptual recalibration of the viewer. Meaning arises through the interplay of objects, gestures, and conditions that converge in inquisitively articulated and open-ended compositions.

3.2 Relational Aesthetics & Activated Spectatorship

Building on the embodied presence of the viewer within Installation Art, this section examines how Relational Aesthetics and the activation of spectatorship further destabilises the traditional separation between artwork, viewer and space. Relational Aesthetics describes artistic practices that foreground inter-human relations as the material and content of art. Its roots can be linked to the 1960s Fluxus movement, that sought to “promote a revolutionary

flood and tide in art; promote living art, anti-art; promote non-art reality to be grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals.”²¹⁴ Prominent artists associated with Fluxus include Joseph Beuys, Yoko Ono, and Nam June Paik. Fluxus, like Relational Aesthetics, prioritised democratic collaboration. Such practices are often participatory, social, and contextual, repositioning the viewer as an active co-producer. Bourriaud states “the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist.”²¹⁵ Such practices often construct spaces or situations that bring people into proximity, encouraging dialogue and shared experience. Emerging partly in response to the pervasive influence of global consumer capitalism, Relational Aesthetics counters the alienation produced by mass-mediated culture. Researcher Mark Pennings observes, “in consuming images, people were enticed into a form of social conditioning. This caused alienation from one's own subjectivity because the self was transformed into commodity forms.”²¹⁶ He further argues that within this context, the relational art object “only exists to ‘materialize a relation to the world’.”²¹⁷

Relational and participatory art extend on installation art’s attempt to not only decentre the viewer, but to recognise their engagement and presence as fundamental. The actions and participation of the viewer reverberates to create meaning, or even to co-create the work entirely. These encounters foster temporary “micro-utopias,”²¹⁸ where participants engage in collective, if provisional, forms of connection and social exchange. An early (and prime) example of this movement is *Pad Thai* (fig.106), where Argentinian-born Thai artist

²¹⁴ George Maciunas. “Manifesto I”. 1963, accessed 12 May 2025.

<https://georgemaciunas.com/about/cv/manifesto-i/>.

²¹⁵ Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics*, 13.

²¹⁶ Mark Pennings. “Relational Aesthetics and Critical Culture.” Paper presented at the Proceedings of the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand Conference 2005: Transforming Aesthetics, Australia, New South Wales, Sydney, 2005.

²¹⁷ Pennings. “Relational Aesthetics and Critical Culture.”

²¹⁸ Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics*, 31.

Rirkrit Tiravanija installed a kitchen inside a New York gallery, cooking and serving food to visitors. As Tiravanija notes, the work was not the food itself but the social encounters it generated; his material list often included ‘lots of people’. Bourriaud viewed *Pad Thai* as revolutionary, framing it as a participatory act that resisted postmodern alienation by fostering a temporary, communal “micro-utopia”²¹⁹ rather than presenting conventional art objects.



Figure 106. Rirkrit Tiravanija. *untitled 1990 (pad thai)*, 1990. Opening event at Paula Allen Gallery, New York, 1990.

In contemporary sculpture and installation, public works frequently activate their environment and audience through unexpected, embodied encounters. Of the artists included, Newby’s practice holds the most relevance in its attunement to participatory art and Relational Aesthetics. Her work frequently explores relational and ephemeral modes of engagement. She expresses her desire “to leave the frame of the exhibition space - only to

²¹⁹ Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics.*, 31.

return to it and register it anew,”²²⁰ reflecting an ongoing interest in the conditions of encounter. She explains, “for me this is less about posing an institutional critique than it is to do with locating an encounter with art in the specifics of a phenomenological relationship to the world and making forms to acknowledge this.”²²¹ This orientation is particularly evident in her *pocket works* (fig.107) - small objects collected, cast, or reconstituted as tiny, travelling assemblages. First exhibited during the 2011 edition of *Prospect: New Zealand Art Now*, the components were gifted to security guards and gallery attendants, who were instructed to take the pieces home with them. Through this act the works disappear from view, accessible only if the custodian chooses to reveal them. This gesture transforms institutional staff into participants, subtly reconfiguring the terms of spectatorship and ownership. Importantly, these works are not preserved as static objects but bear the marks of touch and time. “A lot of the work is metal, and I don’t seal them, so they are able to develop a natural patina from the hand touching. It’s minimal. But I want to see the damage,”²²² Newby says. In this case the act of weathering becomes a record of participation. When the works are later returned to the artist, their altered surfaces testify to an ephemeral and communal unfolding of meaning.

²²⁰ Newby. “Casualness”, 10.

²²¹ Newby. “Casualness”, 10.

²²² Simonini. “An Interview with Kate Newby.” 38.



Figure 107. Kate Newby, *Trust me, trust me.....trust me*, 2024. White brass, sterling silver, bronze, porcelain, stoneware, enamel (7 pieces), variable size.

In a further participatory vein are the instances where she has created doorhandles (figs 108&109) for exhibitions. Crudely made from ceramic or bronze, they are an intentional placement to allow (or even force) a tangible participation of the viewer. They extend Newby's performative ethos, inviting tactile engagement - a response that's especially common with physical, bodily-scaled works. These works effectively capture the viewer's participation (if only momentarily) and the simple act of opening a door may or may not initiate a broader communal interaction.



Figure 108. Kate Newby, *There's more*, 2023. Installation view, Marfa Book Co., Marfa, Texas.



Figure 109. Kate Newby, *There's more*, 2023. Installation view, Marfa Book Co., Marfa, Texas.

Newby's interventions resonate with the tenets of activated spectatorship. Her interest lies in both the social exchange and in the sensorial and material contingencies of "how and where sculpture happens, or even at times, how it un-happens."²²³ This framework positions the viewer as both witness and participant, with meaning emerging in the moment of encounter.

Each artist discussed in this research fosters a form of activated spectatorship, though in distinct and nuanced ways. Bourriaud suggests that "when an artist shows us something, he uses a transitive ethic which places his work between the 'look-at-me' and the 'look-at-that'."²²⁴ The artists here employ this transitive ethic to direct attention beyond the artwork

²²³ Chris Sharp. "Following Kate Newby Down the Road." *MOUSSE*, 2018, 257.

²²⁴ Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics.*, 23.

itself - towards broader cultural, historical, and epistemological concerns. Upritchard, Carmody, and Langdon-Pole navigate this through speculative objects, hybrid forms, and narrative gestures that prompt re-readings of history, materiality, and cultural memory. The viewer's own conditioning often shapes how these works are received and interpreted. Armanious, while less speculative, similarly invites an open-ended engagement, focusing instead on the perceptual act itself. Bourriaud argues that the most distinctive examples of Relational Aesthetics prioritise interpersonal interaction over the autonomous art object. Though the artists included in this research do not claim to be primarily concerned with relations or non-art outcomes, it is clear they do touch on affectations of movements such as those discussed above.

3.3 The Exhibition as Corporeal Experience

The previous section examined the spectator as a relational presence; this section shifts focus to the exhibition as a compositional strategy, shaping not only what is shown, but how it is sensed and navigated. In sculptural and installation practices, the exhibition becomes a dynamic stage where perception is crystallised, mediating between object and viewer, body and work, intention and reception. The context is most often a gallery or museum - sites that bring their own set of parameters and affordances. Elements such as lighting, architecture, thresholds, flooring, acoustics, and even scent all contribute to the experience of the work. Some artists explicitly consider these factors from the earliest stages of making. Carmody, for example, notes that space can be a “contributing factor in the making stages,”²²⁵ influencing how a narrative unfolds in relation to the body and the viewer's path through the exhibition. For others, the negotiation of space emerges closer to the installation stage, demanding a degree of flexibility or intuition in response to place.

²²⁵ Carmody. By Alana Wilson.

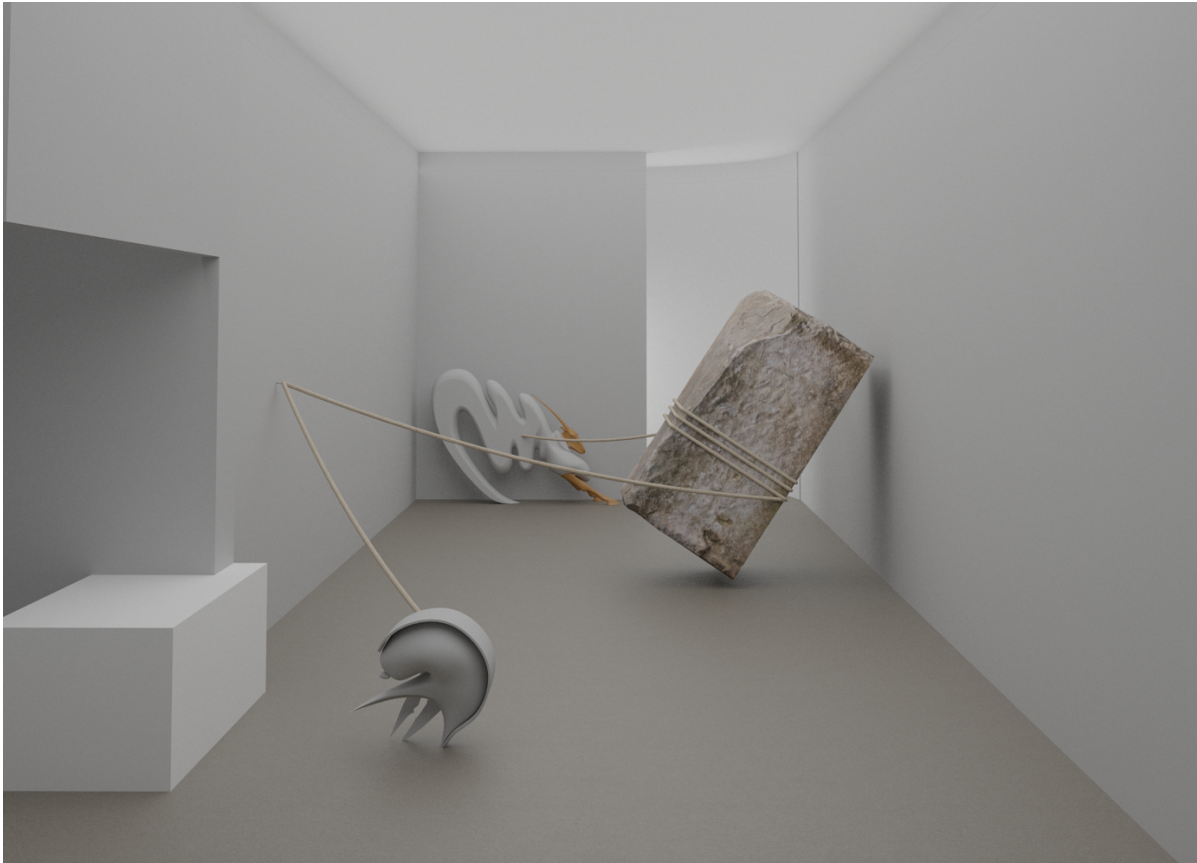


Figure 110. Francis Carmody, *A Relic Remains* (computer-generated exhibition plan), 2023.

In my own practice, I find the exhibition context to be an essential dimension of the work's final form. It does not determine the work in advance but demands a level of clarity and intentionality in shaping an experience. Considerations include: what is the ideal height for the work? What kind of light will allow its textures or colours to emerge most fully? Is there sufficient bodily space for the viewer to look up, or down, or into the work without obstruction? Or do I want to create tension for the viewer by not allowing space or proximity? Does the placement afford intimacy, curiosity, vulnerability? Is there adequate room for stillness and reflection, to pause and consider a work without being hurried by others around them? These considerations reflect a phenomenological commitment to presence, an attunement to the specific experience of encountering a work in a particular place and time. While not Installation Art, these remain key considerations at the point of installation.

Corporeality both shapes and is shaped by the work. Equally, this could be said of the making process. Particularly with ceramics and sculpture, the body and hands are often used as the tools to create. Artists today continue to inherit and complicate this lineage. Exhibitions are active propositions. They are staging grounds for bodily response and emotional resonance where the art of paying attention is prioritised. They can be deeply structured or intentionally loose, immersive or austere. Works may tower over the viewer or hide in floor-level details; they may demand movement or stillness, invoke touch or forbid it. The choreography of objects in space, their material weight, their spacing and silence, all shape how meaning emerges.

The psychology of scale also plays a vital role in shaping viewer response. Size mediates one's perception of presence. Large-scale works may dwarf the viewer, inviting awe or disorientation; smaller works can invite a closeness that feels private, almost secretive. Installation tactics such as manipulating sightlines or creating zones of colour, guide the viewer not only through a space but through a sequence of affective states. Whether intuitive or deliberate, these decisions are integral to sculptural and installation-based thinking. They are the very medium through which the work speaks.

Langdon-Pole approaches the gallery or exhibition as a threshold space “where near and far; past and present; the visual, material and written are conjugated for the purposes of examination and reflection.”²²⁶ He employs variations in scale and material (texture, history, connotation, value) to lead the viewer in the direction of his conceptual enquiry. Larger works such as *The Dog God Cycle* (fig.91) or *Te Whanganui-A-Hei / Cooks Beach 12.06.2019* (fig.68) invite awe and wonder, alluding to an exploding arrival at the vastness of the universe or the depth of time. Smaller assemblages such as *Translatio Studii* (figs 76, 77, 89)

²²⁶ Langdon-Pole. *Zac Langdon Pole's Art Journey*, 79.

and *Passport Argonauta* (fig.195) encourage close observation, summoning a more intimate proximity. Langdon-Pole persistently investigates states of macro and micro within his practice, so it makes sense that this also suffuses the physicality of his works.



Figure 111. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Splendide Mendax* (with Daniel Boyd), 2022. Exhibition view, Station Gallery, Melbourne.

Newby notes that the size, colour, and positioning of pieces in relation to one another all work to say something big, but simple. She shares, “I try to slightly displace my forms when I show them as part of a project, or gallery exhibition. I sometimes think of this displacement as a tweak or little twist that gives a fresh start to things. It’s also about making work feed directly back into lived time and space, because it joins the conversation of what we do in our everyday life and in everyday spaces.”²²⁷ She adds, “when approaching an exhibition situation, I spend time looking at what is already going on within the space. I take note of material constraints and material functions. Is there light? What kind? How many windows are there and what can I see out of them? Is the floor interesting or do I have an

²²⁷ Newby. “Casualness”,66

adverse reaction to it? If so, do I want to work with that reaction?”²²⁸ Further considering the level of engagement with the space, Newby says, “I don’t want to risk people looking at a piece for three seconds and then moving on. So, I often create physical obstacles for people to move or walk around, use their bodies, get to know it.”²²⁹



Figure 112. Kate Newby, *What kind of day has it been*, 2021. Screed, pigment, glass, silver, bronze. Installation view, *YES TOMORROW*, Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery.

Newby has also used colour to physically demarcate or draw attention to zones or spaces. Through colour, she can create a precise atmosphere and permeate a space with tone. The use of colour in this way can infuse or amplify what is already there, in the same way Newby’s material works do. Colour is used as a spatial material in her work. “Yellow, blue and red have the same limitlessness possibilities to them as concrete does. It is something very basic and pre-existing and can be utilised in many of the same ways. I think of colour much as I think of mortar, wood, wool and the weather.”²³⁰ In her installation at the GAK in

²²⁸ Newby. “Casualness”, 9.

²²⁹ Rachael Weinberg. “Beyond Site: An Interview with Kate Newby.” *Union*, 2023.

²³⁰ Newby. “Casualness”, 75.

2010 (fig.113), she painted a zone of bright yellow between a hanging gauze work (essentially a handmade, used picnic blanket) and the windows. Light would filter through the windows, the yellow, and the stained gauze, giving the illusion of levity and sunshine. It added to the sense of optimism, allowing the viewer to believe the hanging gauze blanket was an accrual of times well spent, moments lived outdoors in sunlight and with friends. If this zone was not painted yellow, the viewer might have sensed a grotty, unkempt material hanging near a window as having had an entirely different life. Newby says of colour: “painting something a colour doesn’t take up any room and is a relatively straightforward action, yet its power to alter an environment is substantial. It’s also already a thing. I can take it and use it and I don’t have to invent it or even make it. I just get to use it and it’s easy.”²³¹



Figure 113. Kate Newby, *Crawl out your window*, 2010. Installation view, Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst GAK, Bremen, Germany. Image source: <https://www.katenewby.com/gak.html>

Upritchard also employs several strategies that evoke a corporeal experience. She often exhibits idiosyncratic scales of work, assembled to echo *wunderkammer*-like displays.

²³¹ Newby. “Casualness”, 74.

Her ambiguous installations critique consumerist culture and frame museums, institutions, and cultures as being implicit in this preservation of objects pertaining to a sign of history and value. Although, they also utilise various pieces of found furniture to evoke a connection to domestic life or museological reference. By incorporating plinths and furniture drawn from unexpected contexts, Upritchard destabilises the boundary between artwork and environment, disrupting the museological gaze. This strategy reflects the narrative fluidity of her installations, where bodies, materials, and histories remain in flux. The result is a perceptual slippage - an archaeological theatre of fragments and fictions.

Upritchard's *Land* (fig.114) comprises a series of sculptural figures and hats arranged atop a European wardrobe cabinet, evoking the form and function of a domestic console. The tableau suggests a performative negotiation of identity - figures seemingly trying on various hats or selves. The title, alongside the landscape-like configuration of the components, subtly gestures toward colonial processes of re-identification with foreign land. *Land* was included in her 2016 survey exhibition *Jealous Saboteurs*, which spanned two decades of her practice. The exhibition brought together rarely seen early works - such as *McCahon, 3rd Day* (fig.59) and *Land Table* (fig.58) - with a range of sculptures, ceramics, and faux artefacts, presented in *wunderkammer*- or tableau-like arrangements. This curatorial approach echoed the Western tradition of museum display, invoking themes of cultural accumulation, colonial inheritance, and the aesthetics of institutional collection. The exhibition exemplifies Upritchard's multidisciplinary practice and her sustained interrogation of museological conventions and colonial legacies.



Figure 114. Francis Upritchard, *Land*, 2012. Wardrobes, modelling material, watercolour, 75 x 354 x 120cm.



Figure 115. Francis Upritchard, *Jealous Saboteurs*, 2016. Installation view, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne.



Figure 116. Francis Upritchard, *Jealous Saboteurs*, 2016. Installation view, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne.

Armanious and Ward Knox approach exhibition-making with a sensitivity to tacit awareness and spatial resonance. For both artists, the viewer's bodily movement through a space becomes a kind of perceptual choreography, attuned to texture, silence, proximity, and scale. Armanious prefers to live with his work in domestic settings prior to exhibition, developing a tacit awareness of their presence, scale, and resonance within the rhythms of daily life. This pre-installation mode of engagement reflects his broader practice, where intuitive selection and material transformation emerge through extended periods of observation and arrangement. He frequently subverts traditional modes of display, removing plinths and surfaces to either place work directly on the floor, or create forms that mimic plinths, shelves, or tables. This contextualises pieces as tests or iterations, place-holding in a broader constellation of meaning. His 2016 exhibition *Hollow Earth* (fig.117) shows work that includes display surfaces in the work itself. The work *Hollow Earth* (fig.118)

circumnavigates the formal concern of how to connect the assembled components on one surface by casting the table itself.



Figure 117. Hany Armanious, *Hollow Earth*, 2016. Installation view, Michael Lett.



Figure 118. Hany Armanious, *Hollow Earth*, 2016. Cork, pigmented polyurethane resin, digitally printed vacuum formed polypropylene, 18 carat gold, chrome, 99 x 179 x 73cm.

Armanious takes Upritchard's inquiry further, not only subverting space to question where the artwork ends and the world begins, but why one can't encounter the everyday with the same heightened awareness. This reflects his belief in the inherent luminosity of the world, a radiance often overlooked in the flow of ordinary perception.

Ward Knox is attuned to how scale, weight, and levity structure the viewer's experience of a work. He writes, "Everything that I do has levity in it, even when using dense and heavy materials, I like to be able to take weight from the viewer, to allow a space for them to breathe, to let go of the day for a moment."²³² This sensation of weight made weightless is a spatial operation that creates an atmosphere for the viewer to inhabit. He adds, "I like to give the viewer the chance to infer, to intuit, and to take something that I may not know that I am giving."²³³ Ward Knox has used the floor as a site of quiet activation on several occasions, where installations silently flood the space with presence while avoiding the imposition of mass or volume within the viewer's perceptual field. His 2024 exhibition *Walk on Waking* (fig.119) appears as a more refined iteration of his earlier *Otions* project series (fig.120), featuring softly intersecting sheets of material that form delicate, almost imperceptible sculptural configurations. Despite their subtlety, these works imbue the space with a palpable sense of levity and atmosphere, gently transferring their affective register onto the viewer.

²³² Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.

²³³ Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.



Figure 119. John Ward Knox, *Walk on Waking*, 2024. Installation view, Whangārei Art Museum.



Figure 120. John Ward Knox, *Otions*, 2022. Installation view.

One needs only to observe the artist's efforts of tending to his winter garden (fig.121) to see the echoes of his environment in this work.



Figure 121. John Ward Knox, winter garden, 2022.

Ward Knox's statement for *Walk on Waking* provides a poetic and personal account of the exhibition's beginnings. He writes,

This exhibition started in the dirt, in spring.

Everywhere new life was emerging and I wished to create a celebration of that vegetal flush of optimism, sugars and starches stored in seed and root showing us the new tilt of the earth's axis. I wanted to recognise the tiny forces at work everywhere, pushing and pulling in relation to the constants at the core of it all: the gravitation of our iron heart and the levity of our ambition...

I had an idea of the gallery as an industrial yard - a space reserved for the exceptionally hardy and the exceptionally delicate, for rarified and transmissible ideas. I wanted to show off the spectacular tenacity and sculptural ingenuity of these plants - the ways they grow in, and interact with, a world that is hardened to them. This was to be a sculptural celebration of form and diversity, of geometry, of physics - a series of tiny, unexceptional guides to the universe.

But then, something shifted. The heavy tread of humanity is felt as much in the earth as the roots of these plants. Because the violence of our species is too loud to ignore, the exhibition changed and gained a new name: *Walk on Waking*.

A wake can be something that you leave behind you; in this case, the stillness of reflection, the cultivation of complexity and the transmission of ideas in good faith.

Materially, the show has been simplified to two components: silk and steel.

Silk is a material of transformation. It starts as a mineral wealth that a mulberry tree finds. These minerals are made accessible by water, leached and pried and freed from

the dirt. A tree is always seeking a solution. Solution becomes aspiration as moisture is transported from earth to leaf. Silk has become an exemplar of something human. A mixture of practical and symbolic conceit - luxury.

Steel has a different story. Ferrous rock or fallen meteor, both were uplifted from the earth. We have experimented with this material, and we have made it sing all the tones of humanity - the high notes of artistry, the middle notes of industry and the low notes of warfare.

We have always extracted and transformed, sometimes to balance the world and sometimes to pillage it. I hope that in presenting these two materials I am telling a human story, reconciling our cyclic cruelty and fragile veil of civility with optimism. We are impossible creatures, and we leave both pain and beauty in our wake.²³⁴

Ward Knox's statement ties to several concerns addressed in this thesis, illuminating his thinking behind the work, and how artists frequently form a conscientious enquiry or personal responsibility to issues beyond art. Although *Walk on Waking* (fig.119) registers as a corporeal experience, it is imbued with consideration of land, place, earth, material, ecology, seasons, human destruction, and a global future. It exemplifies the core personal concerns of Ward Knox and reflects philosophies that permeate his daily life and therefore his artistic practice.

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated how meaning and knowledge arises through both the process of making, as well as through the embodied experience of viewing. Both acts - material engagement (making) and perceptual encounter (viewing) - contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the works' meaning. For artists and viewers alike, meaning emerges through various stages, in both bodily and intellectual forms of realisation. The exhibition is a charged space of encounter where works find their final rhythm and fullest relationality. Shifting between the peripheral and the insistent, the exhibition unfolds as an event to be experienced visually, temporally and bodily. For the artists discussed, the exhibition space exceeds its role as frame or backdrop; it becomes a terrain of negotiation

²³⁴ "John Ward Knox: Walk on Waking." Whangārei Art Museum, 2024, accessed 25 June 2025, <https://www.whangareiartmuseum.co.nz/exhibitions/walk-on-waking>.

between viewer and artwork. Through spatial interventions, adaptive installation processes, and materially attuned gestures, they invoke modes of attention that are curious and embodied. Meaning is not always grasped head-on but is generated even after the exhibition comes down. While figures such as Langdon-Pole and Armanious often invoke the cerebral and symbolic, artists like Newby and Ward Knox privilege the physical, sensorial and subconscious registers of experience. Upritchard and Carmody negotiate both realms, crafting speculative narratives that resonate materially and conceptually.

Chapter Four: Material & Processes

4.1 Material Rigour: Clay, Glass, Bronze, Readymades and the Quotidian

Material selection is a fundamental gesture that structures an artist's engagement with matter, process, and meaning. It is an ontological position as much as it is a practical concern, entangling the artist with histories of material origin, production, decay and ethics. Across interdisciplinary practices, artists engage with materials as active participants in meaning-making, transforming the way viewers perceive objects and their embedded narratives. Contemporary discourse around materiality - particularly in relation to New Materialism - challenges anthropocentric assumptions that view materials as inert substances waiting to be shaped. These theories insist on the agency of materials and their capacity to exert influence.

New Materialism emerged from post humanist and ecological thought and contends that matter itself is dynamic and active. This perspective aligns with the practices of artists working with assemblage, installation, and experimental material processes, where materials hold both symbolic meaning and ontological weight. Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things* articulates this stance by positioning objects and materials as possessing what she terms "thing power"²³⁵ - a kind of material agency that exists independently of human intervention. This approach is linked with Object-Oriented Ontology, which suggests that objects exist beyond their relationships with humans. This perspective casts materials as co-authors in artistic enquiry. While I engage meaningfully with the insights offered by New Materialism and its emphasis on the vitality of matter, the framework of Object-Oriented Ontology extends beyond what I find tenable or productive for this research. I believe its speculative detachment from human experience and context renders it intellectually unconvincing, and thus it will not be pursued further in this thesis.

²³⁵ Bennett. *Vibrant Matter*, xvi.

According to Bennet, materials act as quasi-agents with their own propensities, tendencies, and effects. Artists working in this vein engage in a reciprocal negotiation with materials that carry histories, resistances, and behaviours of their own. This is particularly relevant when considering sculptural materials such as bronze, clay, and glass, which undergo transformative processes of firing, casting, or fusing, where the result is often contingent on material reactions beyond the artist's absolute control.

Arte Povera offers a vital precedent for contemporary material practices, privileging process, ephemerality, and material agency over polished form. Emerging in 1960s Italy through artists such as Giovanni Anselmo, Jannis Kounellis (fig.122) and Mario Merz, the movement embraced impermanence, entropy, and site-responsiveness - allowing materials to generate meaning through tactile and temporal encounters. This approach parallels current engagements with assemblage and context as material, such as Bennett's "thing power,"²³⁶ Arte Povera artists treated materials as collaborators. Their works often emerged through open-ended interactions with site and context, collapsing divisions between studio, exhibition, and environment. These strategies anticipate many of the concerns explored in this research; from letting materials lead and embracing contingent processes, to considering context as a co-author in the work. In their radical attentiveness to transformation, decay, and embodied making, Arte Povera's legacies continue to reverberate through the expanded field of contemporary sculpture.

²³⁶ Bennett. *Vibrant Matter*, xvi.



Figure 122. Jannis Kounellis, *Untitled*, 1968. Juta bags, coal, 50 x 220 x 220cm.

This theoretical reorientation is particularly pertinent to contemporary sculptors and installation artists, who consider material on many levels - visual, textural, spatial, conceptual, tacit, and embodied. Material selection is considered on formal, philosophical and ethical levels. It requires an interrogation of the histories of materials, their modes of extraction and circulation, their capacities for transformation, and their afterlives within artistic and environmental ecosystems. The notion of material as possessing intrinsic agency also challenges conventional divisions between natural and synthetic, organic and industrial, historical and contemporary. This approach encourages a reconsideration of how materials migrate across temporal and cultural boundaries. In approaching materiality through the lens of New Materialism, one is compelled to reconsider what it means to ‘choose’ a material. Artists select materials and processes not only to shape the formal character of their work but also as a means of asserting authorship. Materials, in turn, exert their own agency - forming an intuitive, reciprocal language between medium and maker

through which ideas and concerns are articulated. Artists must also consider the ethical and conceptual stakes of material engagement, an imperative that will be explored through the practices of these contemporary artists in the following sections. This section examines the material rigour in the selected artists' works, connecting critical analysis to broader theories of New Materialism and the enduring influence of the Arte Povera ethos. These artists demonstrate how materials are encountered, collaborated with, and allowed to speak.

Ward Knox eloquently captures the significance of material consideration, emphasising its fundamental role in shaping artistic intent and meaning-making. "The materials I use tend to have history, either materially (as a matter that has seen a life of human use) or socially/politically (as a matter that has an association to a type of human endeavour),"²³⁷ he says. He works with natural, often native, materials such as timber, cotton, silk, oil, chain, paua shell, and even whale and human bone - each selected for its tactile qualities, physical and symbolic weight, and embedded cultural significance. He describes this shifting between mediums as a braid that runs through his work, "and when woven together, [creates] a durable and consistent braid that belies the material differences between photography, writing, painting, drawing, carving, assemblage sculpture etc."²³⁸ He is profoundly aware of the symbolic associations held in each material. "Whenever I approach a new material, I try to understand it first on its own terms, and to work out how I can use the strength of the material (as a property of its chemical and physical form) as a core for the conceptual weight of the piece."²³⁹ This approach reflects the ethos of New Materialism, where the materials possess agency and vitality that extend beyond the work. Their proximity and assembled composition generate a charged presence and layered meaning.

²³⁷ Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.

²³⁸ Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.

²³⁹ Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.

Habits (fig.123) depicts used matchsticks and cigarettes, intricately carved from whale bone and pāua shell. These burnt, discarded forms (crafted from materials with past lives) can be read as a critique on environmental degradation, evoking the impact of whaling, the destruction of marine ecosystems, and the broader cost of human consumption on global health and natural life. These materials carry significant potency and vibrancy, intensifying the work's ethical and conceptual weight. Ward Knox recognises that each medium possesses an innate or expressible trait and uses it to “pull a moment from the stream of life to isolate a gesture.”²⁴⁰



Figure 123. Ward Knox, John. *Habits*. 2017. Woolly mammoth ivory, paua shell, dimensions variable.

Kēkē (figs 124&125), a recent series of carved bird sculptures by Ward Knox, presents a considered fusion of materials - found rimu, railway sleeper, pāua shell, sheep bone, and blood. One might infer that his labour itself becomes part of the material language, with the act of carving stands in as an embodied contribution.

²⁴⁰ Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.



Figure 124. Ward Knox, John. *Kēkē V.* 2024. Wood (Recycled railway sleeper, oak, padauk), whale bone, paua shell, 41 x 33.5 x 15.5cm.



Figure 125. Ward Knox, John. *Kēkē V (detail)*. 2024. Wood (Recycled railway sleeper, oak, padauk), whale bone, paua shell, 41 x 33.5 x 15.5cm.

Through their assembled materiality, these works evoke traditional Māori carvings, where bone and pāua were valued not only for their physical properties but also for their symbolic significance. Bone carried the spirit of ancestors (human or animal), while *pāua*, considered *taonga* (treasure), was often used to represent the eyes of carved figures, its iridescence adding both visual vitality and metaphysical depth. *Pāua* is also associated with the stars (*whetū*) and the ancestral gaze from the night sky. While the recognition of material vitality has long been central to indigenous cultures, it also aligns with the ethos of Vibrant Matter, where each material functions as an “actant”²⁴¹ within a dynamic network of forces. Ward Knox’s carvings embody this sensibility, resonating with both the legacies of Māori sculpture and the principles of Vibrant Matter, embedding cultural symbolism and evoking layered connections to identity, heritage and place.

Another pair of carvings, *Kōtuki i & ii* (fig.126), combine carved jarrah, oak, manuka, and kwila timbers with whale bone. These materials draw attention to the ongoing exploitation of natural resources, even as the ecosystems they come from and the creatures that inhabit them face increasing threat and extinction. Perhaps, in a paradoxical gesture, Ward Knox is enacting a form of preservation, honouring the birds by invoking the very materials of their habitats.

²⁴¹ Bennett. *Vibrant Matter*, viii.



Figure 126. Ward Knox, John. *Kōtuki i & ii*. 2024. Jarrah, oak, mānuka, kwila, whale bone, 125.4 x 20 x 20cm each.

The artist lives in close symbiosis with the natural world, drawing from its rhythms and intricacies as a continual source of artistic impetus. He writes:

I live on a river. Yesterday the godwit returned. They are an amazing bird. They breed in Alaska and spend the summer there gorging on nematodes and pelagic crustacea. Then for their first flight they fly for 8-10 days straight without ever stopping. Some 12,000km. Yesterday they arrived in the estuarine river that I live on. They have lost 80% of their body weight on that journey. There is a theory that the godwit was the bird that led Polynesian seafarers to discover and settle Aotearoa. As the seafarers

never saw the birds land as they flew overhead, they reasoned that there had to be land somewhere in the direction that the godwit (*kuaka*) were heading.²⁴²

It is evident that the bird - as a signifier of ecological systems, evolutionary refinement, and a symbol of both nature and place - occupies a profound role in his current practice. The natural landscape in which he lives - its resources, ecologies and fragilities - appears to drive his work, serving both as an expression of appreciation and a quiet reminder of its precarity. He adds, “I hope that I have chosen my materials wisely enough so that the stories the material holds will be fruitful enough for the viewer to take their own path to meaning.”²⁴³

Carmody also integrates found and sourced materials to convey narrative. Although he frequently incorporates 3D-printed fabricated forms, these are paired with natural and reclaimed elements, reflecting a broader conceptual framework. In his interview for this research, he expressed a growing commitment to be more materially honest and rigorous within his practice. Carmody often structures his exhibitions as unfolding narratives, creating a through-line that invites the viewer to derive meaning from the whole, with each material choice contributing to this story. His exhibitions are best understood as cohesive works, where the materials of each piece are in active dialogue with one another.

A Relic Remains (2023) (fig.127) was an exhibition at Gertrude Glasshouse centred around the story of a toothache, connecting the decaying tooth with deterioration on a global scale. Despite all odds, the toothache remains. Carmody used the gallery space to flesh out this narrative in a cinematic-like structuring of a scene.

²⁴² Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.

²⁴³ Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.



Figure 127. Francis Carmody, *A Relic Remains*. Installation view, Gertrude Glasshouse, 2023.

A hand-spliced rope winds through the space, gradually thickening and linking the intimate with the immense. Suspended from it is a large sculptural rock, hovering mid-air. The rope shifts in scale and direction, anchored to iron rings on opposing walls. At either end, a goat and a crab are tethered - astrological sentinels in a symbolic scene that evokes both myth and geology. This installation suggests a contemporary mythology, where bodily pain (like a lingering toothache) mirrors planetary distress. The suspended rock becomes a site of transformation and decay, its shifting colours hinting at organic change. The Capricorn (goat) figure blurs boundaries between the natural and synthetic. Composed of raw rope, MDF, sheep's wool, expandable foam, and plaster, its coiled form presses into the back wall, generating an atmosphere of latent tension. Carmody points out, "I worked with a rope splicer to join a couple of different thicknesses of rope because conceptually this whole exhibition was about connecting; borrowing from the past where stories connected the smallest of things to the largest of things and restaging the story today connecting the small toothache to the

broader calamity.”²⁴⁴ This work exemplifies how both material and form contribute to shaping and communicating the narrative.



Figure 128. Francis Carmody, *A Relic Remains*, 2023. Installation view, Gertrude Glasshouse, Melbourne.

Reflecting further on his material selections for these works: “That rock was made from Styrofoam, which is terrible. Materially, it would be more interesting to do a gradient colour [rather than] painting it.”²⁴⁵ He reflects that the process of making this work led to a desire for greater material honesty in his practice. “A giant tooth could be more interesting to achieve through material [such as] iron that’s rusting, carved wood that’s been in the ocean for four or five years, so it’s really bloated.”²⁴⁶ Such materials would provide a more truthful and realistic sense of global calamity, imbuing the work with true impermanence and decay, thus contributing to the overarching narrative with erudition. Carmody is exploring the

²⁴⁴ Carmody. By Alana Wilson.

²⁴⁵ Carmody. By Alana Wilson.

²⁴⁶ Carmody. By Alana Wilson.

incorporation of cork, as well as experimenting with flocking plant-like forms in pollen for future projects.



Figure 129. Francis Carmody, *A Relic Remains*, 2023. Installation view, Gertrude Glasshouse, Melbourne.

Signs and symbols proliferate in the materials for Carmody. Nothing is neutral and each object, surface, and gesture contributes to a larger speculative ecology. The commitment to material specificity and conceptual clarity echoes certain traditions of Arte Povera, yet his work remains distinctly contemporary in its allusion to emergent technologies and current concerns (ecological, political, ethical). Carmody posits that “objects have power. And in some ways using synthetic work or synthetic materials also has its own place... It’s all natural in a strange way.”²⁴⁷ This statement exemplifies Bennett’s concept of Vibrant Matter, wherein each material possesses its own agency - resonating with the Arte Povera ethos of treating materials as active collaborators in the creative process.

²⁴⁷ Carmody. By Alana Wilson.

In *Signal Detection* (fig.6), a group exhibition curated by Tamsen Hopkinson at Mejia Gallery in Melbourne, Carmody presents what he calls “a suspended scene of work that considers linear and circular time.”²⁴⁸ The installation reads as a constellation of entangled temporalities, evoking the speculative logic of modelling. This approach informs both the conceptual framework and the material execution of the work. The works incorporate 3D-printed components encased in resin, resting on nests of horsehair, coated in tar, or suspended as blown-glass elements from graph-like structures that puncture and hover in the space. These forms draw aesthetic and structural reference from financial diagrams and data visualisations, particularly the concept of a Black Swan event.²⁴⁹ For *Black Swan: incubating* (fig.130), Carmody envisioned a nest to cradle a black, amorphous form - suggestive of an egg or foetal mass. After researching various nest structures and unsuccessfully experimenting with twigs and branches, he turned to horsehair, eventually sourcing a kilogram from an obscure online supplier. Horsehair as a material offered a more organic and unruly solution, evoking both the delicacy and tension inherent in the work.

²⁴⁸ “Francis Carmody.” 2025.

²⁴⁹ Black Swan Event: A financial term for an unforeseen event that’s often catastrophic, such as 9/11, the 2008 global financial crisis, or Brexit.



Figure 130. Francis Carmody, *Black swan: incubating*, 2024. Plaster, horsehair, polymer paint, nylon, 60 x 60 x 30cm.

For The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth (fig.131), the end section of the sculpture is covered in tar. The tar reads as a sticky, toxic, yet quotidian symbol of industrialised urban society, seemingly dragging down the fluid, swan-like form of the sculpture. The squiggly form recalls the goat figure in *A Relic Remains* (fig.128), conveying a sense of recoiled energy - alluding to a precipice or tension of the natural world. Carmody shares how he manages to source some of these materials: “I call the city of Melbourne to get the road supplier, to then call the road supplier to get the maintenance people, to then go to the truck where they’re re-tarring something in the suburbs and say ‘Hey, can you put some of this on my sculpture?’”²⁵⁰ He considers material rigour as paramount to having a sculptural practice. “I really think [with] sculpture...it’s the material aspect you can achieve. Why paint

²⁵⁰ Carmody. By Alana Wilson.

it black when you can make it black with road tar?”²⁵¹ The title of this work speaks to both the works conceptual logic as well as Carmody’s own quest for material honesty.



Figure 131. Francis Carmody, *The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth*, 2024. Steel, plaster, charcoal, tar, Indian ink, polymer paint, polyurethane, pine, 260 x 150 x 50cm.

Other works in this show nod to the stock market through their titles - *bullish*, *bearish*, *porkish*, *dovish*. This interest in rupture and unpredictability is embedded not only in the themes of the work but in its material logic - brittle, gleaming, volatile, and unruly. The erratic presence of the sculptures destabilises the viewer’s path through the gallery, enacting spatial and perceptual disruptions akin to the phenomena the works reference. “The grit and verisimilitude of the tar and horsehair material is almost warning or advising us of something. Through the material qualities of the work, we get the sense of being stuck or poisoned, we can feel a strong sense of discomfort, a forewarning to impending doom or failure; not dissimilar to what I imagine a Black Swan event to feel like,”²⁵² says Carmody. His careful

²⁵¹ Carmody. By Alana Wilson.

²⁵² Carmody. By Alana Wilson.

selection of materials reflects both the sensory engagement he seeks to evoke and the conceptual framework of his exhibitions. This thoughtful approach results in a compelling narrative expression and aligns with a core principle of sculpture, working in dialogue with materials and knowing when to let them express their own tendencies.

The instances where he has worked with artisans (such as a rope splicer or glass blower) highlight the highly specialised processes required to produce certain components. A recent work in glass - *Hawk-ish: From Above* (figs 131&132) - is recessed into the ceiling. The piece takes the form of a bulbous, beady avian eye, peering down at the viewer with predatory intent. Unlike the expected transparency of glass, this work feels dense and watchful. Its crafted materiality distinguishes it from cinematic props or thematic spectacle. The eye has been intentionally installed to impose its presence on the viewer beneath it. Carmody's decision to render this component in glass rather than through 3D printing reflects a commitment to material honesty. Despite the greater cost and complexity, glass offers a level of authenticity and symbolic precision that a fabricated alternative could not achieve. The creation of a non-functional object in a traditionally craft-based medium, installed with such intentionality and nuance, marks a compelling direction for a young sculptor. This kind of material enquiry - where materials are liberated from their historical functions and associations - demonstrates how conceptual depth in contemporary practice can emerge through recontextualization and material transformation.

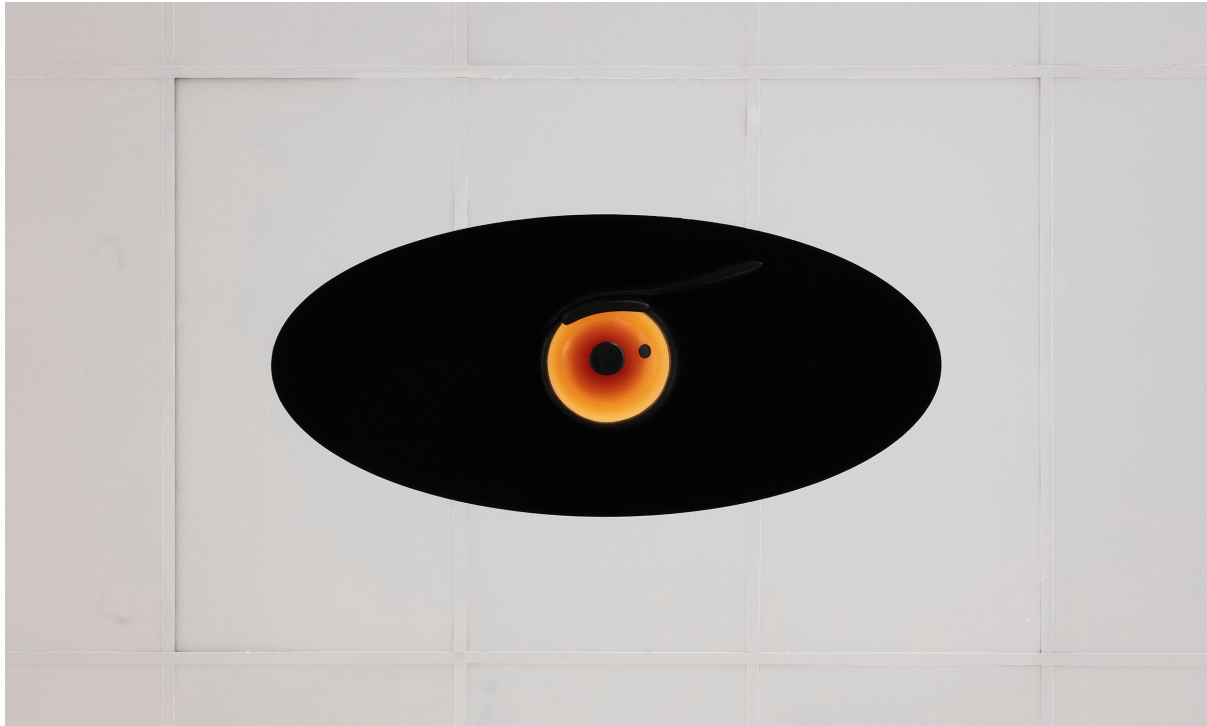


Figure 131. Francis Carmody, *Hawkish: From Above*, 2024. Blown glass, resin, steel, plywood and colour pigment. Installation view, Gertrude Studios, Melbourne.



Figure 132. Francis Carmody, *Hawkish: From Above*, 2024. Blown glass, resin, steel, plywood and colour pigment. Installation view, Gertrude Studios Melbourne.

Langdon-Pole's practice parallels Carmody's in its material rigour and a commitment to what could be considered a politics of material. Both artists engage materials for both their physical qualities and for their capacity to carry, complicate, and contest meaning. Their practices are informed by an ethics of selection, extending to a concern with the origins and

symbolic weight of matter. This aligns closely with Bennett's notion of Vibrant Matter, where things possess their own vitality and capacity to shape outcomes. Langdon-Pole interrogates epistemologies through the use of diverse natural and historical materials, often sourced online. By bringing rare and conspicuous materials together, the artist exposes compelling sets of affinities and contrasts. In his *Passport Argonauta* series (fig.195), the fragile and submarine nature of the paper-nautilus shell (a Fibonacci-esque form which houses a species of octopus) hosts a unique meteorite fragment that has been shaped, polished and etched to fit within the delicate cavity. The murky, luminous meteorite nestled within the void (and predating Earth itself) offers us a contemplation of ancient geological time. The consequential thoughts of these two found objects condense into a myriad of open-ended questions. What is their origin? Their destination? How did they coalesce here? What time and location were they active and moving and part of our universe? And how does the context of viewing them in a gallery change our interaction with, or attention to them?



Figure 195. Zac Langdon-Pole, *Passport (Argonauta) (v)*, 2018. Paper nautilus shell, Sericho meteorite (iron pallasite, landsite: Sericho, Kenya), 10.7 x 3.3 x 5.6cm.

Many of Langdon-Pole's exhibitions marry disparate readymade fragments that seek to expose fractured knowledge systems, colonial legacies, and the poetic potential of incomplete forms. His material convergences are never arbitrary. They enact a slow choreography of alignment and tension, pointing to invisible threads that connect seemingly unrelated histories and geographies. He shares, "I'm interested in prompting a certain quality and duration of attention. That's really what I'm working with, more than any particular content or material,"²⁵³ adding, "I like Italo Calvino's motto: hurry slowly. Art needs to arrest your attention quickly, but sustain it indefinitely, slowly unfolding. It's a fine balance."²⁵⁴ His work proliferates in a constellation of disciplines; the science of materials (metals, polymers, ceramics, composites) and the natural sciences (astronomy, physics, chemistry, earth science, biology, zoology, botany), as well as philosophy, literature, art, history, anthropology, photography - deployed with erudition but through the idiosyncratic processes of art. Langdon-Pole's approach exemplifies a form of embodied knowledge-building that weaves a matrix of associations.

A Quiver of Names (fig.196) juxtaposes several readymades to evoke cultural dissonance and colonial conflict. A stack of three antique typewriters sits atop a set of specimen drawers, their keys each replaced with various ancient arrowheads. The work suggests a tension between the era of the typewriter (with its access to language, authorship, and historical record), and the era of bow-and-arrow warfare (concerned with the preservation of self, land, and community). The arrangement seems to warn against the act of rewriting and suggests a confrontation between two forms of knowledge: recorded, institutional history and the older, embodied knowledge of conflict, survival, and ancestral memory. The specimen drawers allude to the human impulse to preserve and categorise

²⁵³ Leonard. "Zac Langdon-Pole: Hurry Slowly."

²⁵⁴ Leonard. "Zac Langdon-Pole: Hurry Slowly."

history, albeit preserving only what is recorded (through means such as a typewriter), while unrecorded violently suppressed histories are omitted and forgotten. Langdon-Pole directs our attention to the interpolations between the objects in this assemblage, drawing on their individual histories and associations to evoke a broader, layered dialogue. He successfully and potently activates each readymades potential to contribute to the viewer's generation of meaning through the work.



Figure 196. Zac Langdon-Pole, *A Quiver of Names (detail)*, 2022. Wooden specimen cabinet drawers, Blickensderfer, Royal, and Underwood typewriters, keys replaced with mixed ancient arrowheads: Neolithic (c. 7000-700 BCE); Ancient Greek (c. 1200 BCE-600 AD); Roman (c. 753 BC-1453 AD); Ottoman (c. 1400-1600 AD), 155 x 48.5 x 42.5cm.

The use of found, sourced, or readymade materials to redefine associated hierarchies is a consistent thread in the practices of Carmody, Langdon-Pole, Upritchard and Armanious. This approach reflects the enduring influence of Arte Povera, particularly in its sustained emphasis on organic matter and the expressive capacities of found materials and readymades. Anselmo's *Direzione* (1967-68) (fig.197) exemplifies this ethos. A rough slab of schist with a compass embedded in its surface, the work functions both literally and metaphorically as a directional tool. Positioned on the floor and subject to gravitational force, it resists the pedestalled objecthood typical of gallery conventions. Anselmo sought to "manifest the energy of matter"²⁵⁵ by focussing on the direct engagement between natural materials and the viewer. Art historian, Elizabeth Mangini notes that Arte Povera has too often been misread as a mere embrace of "poor materials;"²⁵⁶ rather, it directly interrogated the socio-political frameworks that governed the production and reception of art.

²⁵⁵ "Direzione, 1968." Pinault Collection, accessed 29 May 2025, <https://lesoeuvres.pinaultcollection.com/en/artwork/direzione>.

²⁵⁶ Mangini, Elizabeth. "Arte Povera." *Artforum International* 46, no. 3 (2007): 159-62.



Figure 197. Giovanni Anselmo, *Direzione*, 1968. Granite and compass, 18 x 155 x 50cm. Pinault Collection. Image source: <https://lesoeuvres.pinaultcollection.com/en/artwork/direzione>

In a similar vein to Arte Povera is the Fluxus movement, which focussed more so on the creative process itself, as well as experimental art forms and interdisciplinary approaches. Joseph Beuys, whose practice spanned both movements, is renowned for his unconventional and conceptually charged use of everyday, non-specialist materials. He envisioned a broader social role for art, encompassing ideas such as social sculpture and the integration of art into everyday life. Beuys frequently employed unconventional, everyday materials such as felt,

fat, and honeycomb for their symbolic and sensory resonance. In *Honigpumpe am Arbeitsplatz* (1977) (fig.198), honey was pumped through a complex system of tubes at *Documenta 6*, symbolising collective energy, sustenance, and the flow of ideas. Beuys's material choices enacted philosophical and political ideas through physical form, aligning with postmodern theories of Deleuze and Guattari, who similarly drew from natural systems to articulate pre- and para-political thought.²⁵⁷ Honey functioned both as a material (produced through a highly structured biological network), as well as a catalyst for the work's primary outcome - a network of relations.



Figure 198. Joseph Beuys, *Honigpumpe am Arbeitsplatz*, 1977. *Documenta 6*, Kassel, Germany.

²⁵⁷ Pre-political: Before the development or introduction of politics. Para-political: beyond the traditional confines of established political systems and structures.

Fluxus and Arte Povera both sought to resist the commodification of the art object, dissolving formal and institutional boundaries to position material as an active, experiential force. Langdon-Pole frequently acquires his found objects through online platforms, highlighting the contemporary ease of access to historical and cultural material. This mode of sourcing underscores a significant shift from earlier practices such as Arte Povera, where such accessibility to global artefacts was far less prevalent. Carmody similarly sources obscure materials, sometimes directly from non-art industries (such as tar and horsehair), further underscoring a material logic shaped by contingency and cross-sectoral exchange. Both artists employ material as a perceptual tool that aids conceptual enquiry and exposes the latent associations carried by each material. While Langdon-Pole interrogates systems of knowledge and colonial collecting practices, his works remain tethered to the gallery context, circulating as refined art commodities. Newby aligns more directly with the values of Arte Povera through her use of industrial cast-offs and waste materials. Her installations often oscillate between the transient and the permanent - *Hours in the Wind* (figs 219&220) exemplifies ephemerality, while site-specific installations such as *YES TOMORROW* (figs 112, 119, 241, 242, 243), *always, always, always* (fig.201) and *The edge of the earth* (figs 200, 223, 239) are technically permanent but installed only temporarily, thus destined for disappearance or disposal. These examples embrace both temporal and material impermanence central to Arte Povera, while also raising ethical questions about material waste in contemporary practice.

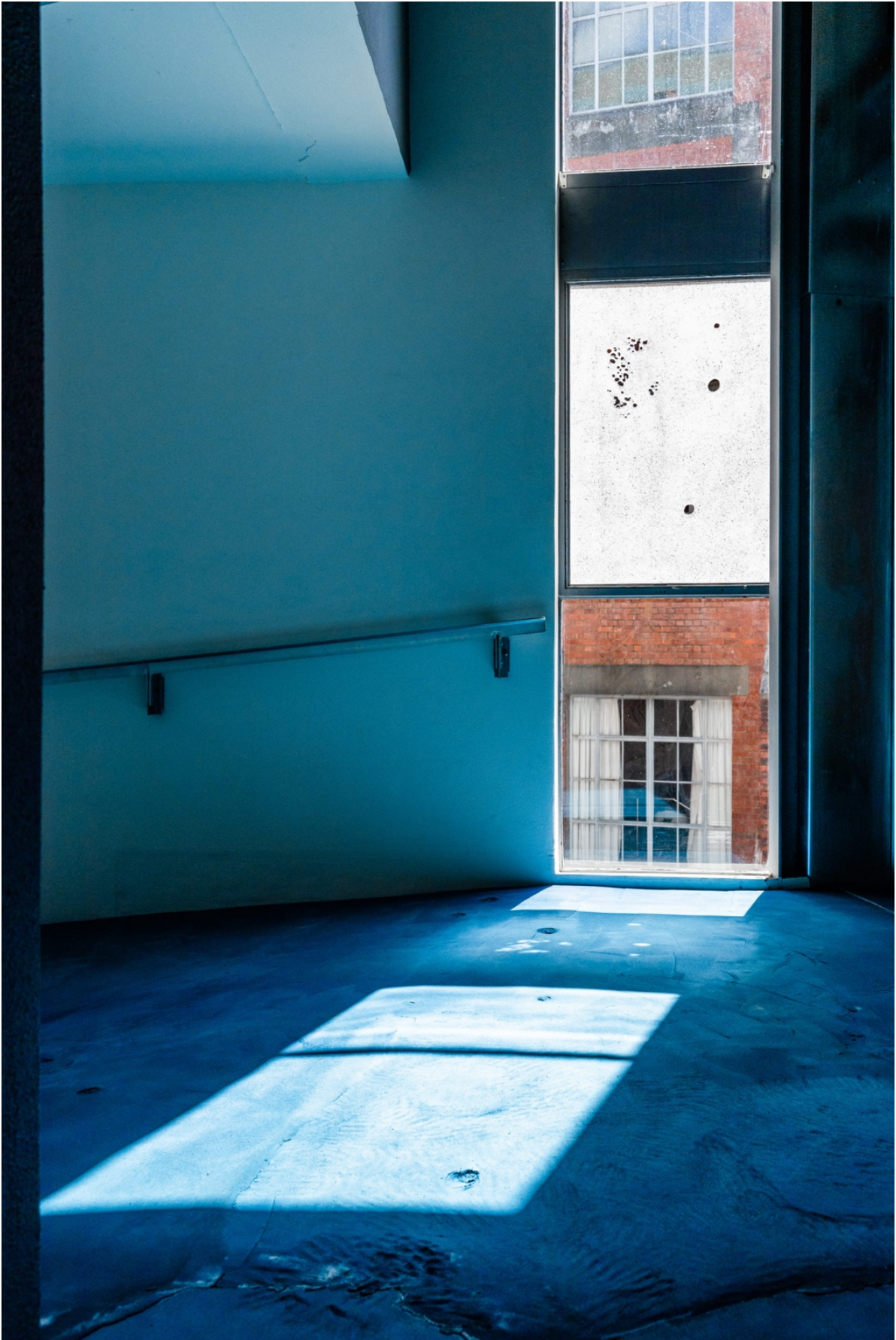


Figure 199. Kate Newby, *YES TOMORROW*, 2021. Installation view, Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi, Wellington.



Figure 200. Kate Newby, *The edge of the earth*, 2022. *Réclamer la Terre*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris.



Figure 201. Kate Newby, *always, always, always*, 2023-2024, *Ephemeral Anchoring*, Maison Hermès Le Forum, Tokyo.

Armanious, in contrast, does not work with found materials in the conventional sense. Instead, he uses found form, which he replicates through casting. His found objects (or readymades) are often broken, cheap, domestic, or banal. Their use reflects a broader engagement with the quotidian in contemporary art, challenging established value hierarchies and revealing the quiescent luminosity within everyday matter. These works evoke humanistic qualities while blurring the boundary between object and image. He attempts to reveal “the hidden character or essence of the matter. The readymade is rendered irreversible by its copy and finally seen in all its strangeness and particularity.”²⁵⁸ A formative encounter regarding his criticality towards objects occurred during a visit to his father’s flat, where his “usual disgust and horror began to give way to the aesthetically compelling in a collapse and reversal of value... [he] woke up to the potential and potency of the found object.”²⁵⁹ What initially registered as domestic debris became arresting in its “unselfconsciousness and

²⁵⁸ Armanious. “From Nothing”, 41.

²⁵⁹ Armanious. “From Nothing”, 24.

nakedness.”²⁶⁰ Echoes of this are evident in his works for *The Golden Thread* at the 2011 Venice Biennale (figs. 1&202), where Armanious has arranged a selection of facsimiles seemingly drawn from 1980s classrooms, offices or art school sculpture studios - items with age and wear, unextraordinary in their origins, yet assembled as an elucidating installation. Many are cast in pigmented polyurethane resin, although some works include metals such as bronze and pewter. The inclusion of metals in earlier works suggests a period of refinement in Armanious’s casting process; he now works exclusively in resin, achieving high fidelity in forms that convincingly mimic other materials. Yet his approach to assemblage and installation persists, with forms placed in dialogue to echo the domestic setting of his father’s flat, or perhaps to subtly infiltrate the viewer’s own everyday environment.



Figure 202. Hany Armanious, Studio view of sculptures for *The Golden Thread*, Australia Pavilion, 54th Venice Biennale, 2011.

By replicating the original objects, Armanious actively engages in material mimesis to destabilise authenticity and authorship, treating the copy as a site of heightened presence.

²⁶⁰ Armanious. “From Nothing”, 24.

This deliberate strategy produces a kind of anti-monumentality, echoing Arte Povera's challenge to fixed meaning and Fluxus's embrace of the ephemeral, process-based, and anti-institutional.

The readymade (in art), most famously introduced by Marcel Duchamp in the early twentieth century, set the foundation for this perceptual shift, inviting viewers to confront the arbitrary thresholds between art and life. Duchamp's urinal (*Fountain*, 1917) (fig.203), placed in a gallery context, demanded an interpretive leap - a moment of inner enlightenment, akin to a crossing of invisible thresholds. In his 1994 essay *Simulated Readymades*, Groys elaborates on this transformation, "where the [viewer's] inner, purely mental decision to see things differently... acquires mythical dimensions. [It] allows us to see the familiar from a new angle and to contemplate what is hidden below surfaces."²⁶¹ This reorientation of consciousness is fleeting and unstable as it is also steeped with the distinction between thing and image.

²⁶¹ Groys. "Simulated Readymades.", 34.



Figure 203. Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917/1964. Ceramic, glaze, paint, 38.1 x 48.9 x 62.5cm.

The distinction between the everyday and artwork is less prevalent (and less significant) in contemporary culture, compared to the twentieth century. Armanious is acutely aware of this, questioning whether his material transformations truly ‘improve’ the object or simply relocate it within a different system of value; “Why take the additional step of replication after arriving at an interesting assemblage of readymade components? Does reproducing it in plastic make it any better, any smarter? Is its value enhanced through a material transformation?”²⁶² These questions speak directly to the contradiction at the heart of

²⁶² Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

contemporary sculpture - the tension between the intellectual act of selection (Duchamp) and the material labour of transformation (Armanious). Whereas Duchamp's gesture was about stripping art of aesthetic engagement, Armanious reintroduces materiality as an essential part of the conceptual manoeuvre. This aligns with New Materialism, where the "member-actant"²⁶³ material is vital. Armanious's works insist on their own presence, existing both as a physical entity and an elusive illusion. He notes "The very contrivance of the reproduction enshrouds the object with a particular sanctity and beauty - an aura of absolute uniqueness."²⁶⁴ His process elucidates how the act of re-creation strips an object of its prior function and embeds it in an alternate system of meaning. Although the echo of its prior function remains. His cast replications are things that have been emptied of their former use and transformed into pure presence. Drawing on precedents established by Duchamp and later expanded by Fischli and Weiss (figs 82-84), Armanious's *Voiding* (fig.204) is a work in which the artist meticulously reproduced a glass jar sitting alongside a block-like plaster mould. Equally important to Armanious is the casting process itself, which feels evident in the selection of objects cast in this work. He reflects on the pairing of these two elements:

This block had been left outside in the soil under a tree, where it became stained and blotchy around its base. It was an intriguing object that had an undeniable presence, especially when I took it inside and set it on the floor of my apartment. For months I could not figure out what to do with this thing. As much as I liked it, there was no entry point for a possible interaction with it because it was so self-contained and perfectly proportioned. Then, one night after taking out the recycling, I noticed that I had left a glass jar behind, sitting on the floor next to the block. Suddenly, there was a dialogue between the two objects; the block now looked monumental and solemn next to the empty clear vessel that now appeared to have some odd ceremonial function. The more I contemplated this pair of objects, the more they suggested a vanishing or dramatic departure of some kind. These were the remains of an evaporation of sorts, whose traces could be seen in the two cavities on top of the block and insinuated in the stark emptiness of the jar. This enigmatic relationship was a sufficient signal for me to proceed with their casting.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ Bennett. *Vibrant Matter*, viii.

²⁶⁴ Armanious. "From Nothing", 41.

²⁶⁵ Armanious. "From Nothing", 38.



Figure 204. Hany Armanious, *Voiding*, 2020. Pigmented polyurethane resin, 29 x 29 x 27.5cm & 17.5 x 8.5 x 8.5cm.

The object's emptiness is not a lack but a philosophical fullness. The “enigmatic relationship”²⁶⁶ Armanious recognised remains preserved for the viewer to consider. He reflects that this work foregrounds: “the conceptual connection that sometimes exists between the casting process and the sculpture itself, when method and subject meet. These fundamental processes of flooding and evacuation, holding and being held, forming cells...”²⁶⁷ seem to echo in the resulting work. The work's making and meaning become intertwined and “the manual toil becomes analogous to and symbolic of the object's underlying intimations.”²⁶⁸ In this separation from the original object, the reproduction still has objecthood but “the kind of history of it falls away and you have to look at it differently. You are forced very close to it just through the fact of its replication.”²⁶⁹ Armanious clarifies this gesture is enacted “not as a provocation of what constitutes an artwork, but instead to

²⁶⁶ Armanious, Hany. “From Nothing”, 38.

²⁶⁷ Armanious, Hany. “From Nothing”, 45.

²⁶⁸ Armanious, Hany. “From Nothing”, 45.

²⁶⁹ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

coax out a poetic dimension utilising the flimsy, the soiled and the broken.”²⁷⁰ *Voiding* (fig.204) encapsulates key dichotomies in Armanious’s practice through the interplay of two objects, both empty, yet suggestive of potential fullness. This tension mirrors the philosophical duality that underpins his work, where conceptual emptiness coexists with the possibility of meaning. One object is opaque, the other transparent, evoking themes of concealment and revelation, or *trompe l’oeil*. Together, they stage a visual and conceptual duality that reflects Armanious’s engagement with readymade material and casting as both a process and a metaphor for perception, presence, and interpretation.

In other instances, Armanious has drawn from the everyday in similarly intimate ways. In a 2015 series, he translated his then four-year-old son’s scribbles into woven nylon carpets. These works (figs 205&206) simultaneously reference the historical role of textiles and tapestries in Middle Eastern cultures as carriers of cultural memory, while preserving the fleeting gestures of a child’s hand and imagination. Armanious’s material choice presents the tapestry (or even more low brow: a nylon carpet) as a signifier of the quotidian, whilst simultaneously alluding to the extraordinary luminosity embedded in the everyday, as seen in his son’s drawings.

²⁷⁰ Armanious. “From Nothing”, 24.



Figure 205. Hany Armanious, *untitled*, 2015. Installation view, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery.



Figure 206. Hany Armanious, *untitled*, 2015. UV reactive dye on cut pile nylon carpet, 202 x 282cm.

Upritchard incorporates quotidian elements of readymade furniture into her installations (figs 21, 22, 58, 67, 114-116, 207), often using domestic and historically inflected objects to bridge the imagined realms of her figures with the material realities of everyday life. The furnishings span functions and eras, operating as active participants in her sculptural tableau. These gestures allow Upritchard to draw associations between the intimate scale of domestic life and broader historical narratives, using their histories and associations to garner a relational response for the viewer.



Figure 207. Francis Upritchard, *Paper, Creature, Stone*, 2023. Installation view, Ivan Anthony Gallery, Auckland.

The interplay between material value, form, and scale is central to Upritchard's practice, which spans materials including readymades, balata²⁷¹, thermoplastics, ceramics, glass, textiles, and metals. Her works (often figures, faux artefacts, and cultural hybrids staged in museological settings) both depend on and critique the institutions that present them. Upritchard has developed a sustained engagement with various sculptural materials as a means of material translation. Many of her bronzes begin in balata, a rare natural rubber sourced from Brazil, which is softened in water, manipulated into form, and then cooled into a semi-rigid state. This material, with its organic malleability, allows her to sculpt figures that retain an intimate and gestural presence. Once the balata originals are transferred into bronze, their surfaces maintain traces of their earlier softness - wrinkles, stretched textures, and indentations that reveal their pliant origins. This process of transience underscores the vitality found in each medium (relative to *Vibrant Matter*), where the flexibility of balata is held within the material memory of bronze, yet gaining its quality of endurance. Her use of balata suits her intuitive, haptic approach, allowing for spontaneous small-scale sculptures from leftover material. She often oscillates between balata and bronze, using the former to capture immediacy and gesture. In her 2025 exhibition *Medusa*, Upritchard exhibited both balata works (*Power Tool*, fig.208) and bronzes cast from balata originals (*Mermaid Ears*, fig.209), subtly collapsing the distinction between materials and imbuing bronze with a softened, leathery presence.

²⁷¹ Balata, a natural rubber extracted from trees which thrive along the equator, was first harvested in Brazil for export in the 1940s and used in U.S. industries like machinery belts, golf balls, and underwater cables. No longer used for industrial purposes, it is now mostly used by local Brazilian artisans. Upritchard first discovered the material during a residency in Brazil in the early 2000s, where artisan Darlindo José de Oliveira Pinto introduced her to its unique working process. After soaking in cold water and heating to 80°C, balata becomes soft and pliable, allowing for shaping in a cold-water bath, which reduces viscosity and slows gravity's effects. Harvested only every eight years, its extraction is carefully managed by Darlindo using ethical and sustainable methods. Upritchard is the only artist outside the region with access to this rare material.



Figure 208. Francis Upritchard, *Power Tool*, 2024. Balata rubber, 26 x 14 x 7cm.



Figure 209. Francis Upritchard, *Mermaid Ears (detail)*, 2024. Bronze, silver, 45 x 25 x 12cm.

Upritchard does not see any hierarchy in materials or scale in her works. When it comes to material selection, she considers the element of artistic control, as well as the spontaneity she wants in her work. She identifies between ‘fast works’ and ‘slow works’. Fast works are generally of a smaller scale, utilising a wider material vocabulary (such as balata, thermoplastic, or *shibuichi*²⁷²), where she can experiment quickly and spontaneously. “Small works are quite important to me because I can make them very fast. The bigger you get, the more [time] you have to spend on things. I’m quite an impatient person and I do like to immediately get a feel for the work by making it. If something takes too [long], I lose interest quite often.”²⁷³ Cabinets and collections of these fast works are often presented en masse, like a kind of *wunderkammer*, highlighting the array of immediate gestures, as well as demonstrating a vast material knowledge. She says of this faster, intuitive and embodied

²⁷² *Shibuichi* (Japanese): metal alloy traditionally used in Japan.

²⁷³ Kunsthall Charlottenburg. “Francis Upritchard: Any Noise Annoys an Oyster.”

process, “you can really see the type of figuration is very much connected to the material.”²⁷⁴ This approach shares her material experimentation while also presenting broader questions of preserved epistemologies and institutional critique.



Figure 210. Francis Upritchard, *Any Noise Annoys an Oyster*, 2024. Installation view, Kunsthal Charlottenburg, Copenhagen.

The looseness found in small sculptures helps with the momentum of making. She considers larger works to be slower works, which require a greater level of planning and pre-

²⁷⁴ Hald. “Artist Francis Upritchard: I Can’t Help the Whole World Heal.”

determining outcomes. She constructs armatures for larger works and produces drawings to guide the intended direction of the piece. Her largest works yet - *Here Comes Everybody* (Figs 25&213) - were originally made of balata before being cast in bronze. They are towering figures, up to 7m tall, inspired by mythology, folklore, and the surrounding Moreton Bay fig trees. Despite their bronze composition, they feel playful, enigmatic, and pliable. Their elongated limbs and malleable-like surfaces seem to reference Giacometti's bronze figures, both graceful and awkward.



Figure 211. Francis Upritchard, *Reach*, 2022. Bronze maquette with potassium sulphate and zinc oxide patina, 118.1 x 47.8 x 126cm.



Figure 212. Francis Upritchard, *Here Comes Everybody*, 2022, work in progress at Fonderia Guastini in Italy.

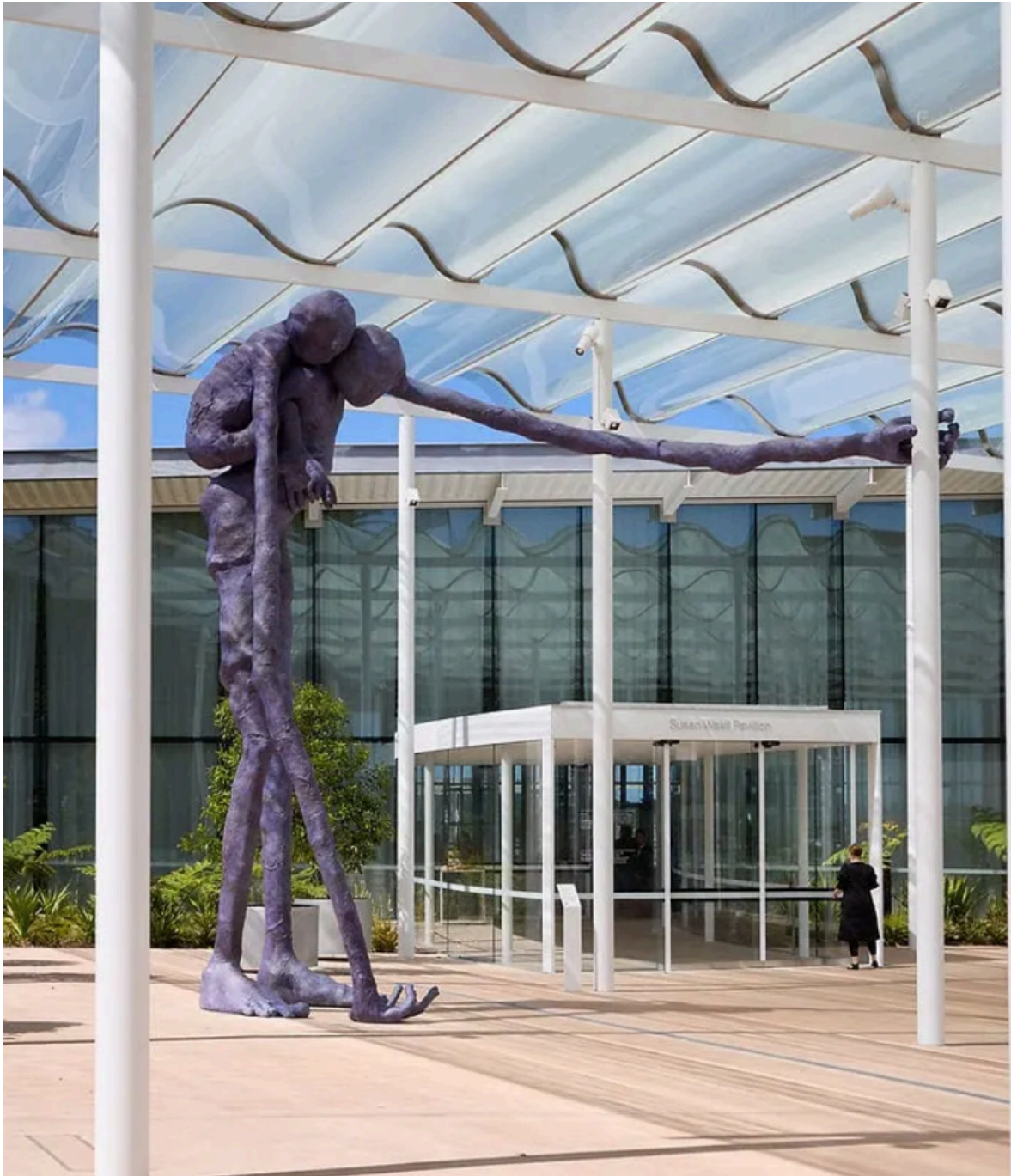


Figure 213. Francis Upritchard, *Here Comes Everybody*, 2022. Bronze, installation view.

Additionally, Upritchard has described how spatial and material limitations influenced the scale of certain works. *Three Dinosaur Problem* (fig.214) was initially conceived as a towering stack of eight dinosaurs, designed to fill an entire room and overwhelm viewers with the looming presence of extinct and speculative creatures. Beginning with the smaller top-layer forms, Upritchard was soon forced to rethink the composition due to technical constraints. Without the foundational support of the larger dinosaurs originally planned for

the base, the smaller forms lacked stable footing. In response, she reconfigured the sculpture mid-process, placing the two upper segments precariously, as she described, “clambering over and squashing three other smaller sculptures.” Reflecting on this shift, she remarked, “that’s kind of a nice thing with changing your mind halfway through a system.”²⁷⁵



Figure 214. Francis Upritchard, *Three Dinosaur Problem*, 2024. Balata rubber, steel, 296 x 300 x 120cm.

²⁷⁵ Kunsthal Charlottenburg. “Francis Upritchard: Any Noise Annoys an Oyster.”

Upritchard insists that small works hold just as much value as such large works, due to their spontaneous nature. Sometimes it is the smaller, more intuitive gestures that carry the greatest potency - embodying a clarity of intention unmediated by extensive planning or external assistance. Larger works frequently demand logistical coordination, extended timelines, and the involvement of others, subtly diluting the immediacy of the artist's hand. Upritchard articulates a critical point for sculptors: the physical and material constraints of specific mediums inevitably shape both the scale and form of the work. Her distinction between 'fast works' and 'slow works' speaks not only to the tempo of making, but also to the material's inherent capacities and limitations. She adds "I don't want to be judged just on the big things...that doesn't tell the whole story at all."²⁷⁶ However, viewers may perceive larger works as more fully realised, interpreting their scale and execution as a reflection of the artist's commitment to their materialisation. While working on *Here Comes Everybody*, Upritchard felt compelled to make numerous quick sculptural sketches in balata at the end of each day. After working with large components and a team of assistants, she wanted to have a direct hands-on approach to the project, so she created smaller pieces that populate the feet or shoulders of the larger figures. Though later cast in bronze, they retain their intimate scale, contrasting with the fabricated grandeur of the main forms.

²⁷⁶ Hald. "Artist Francis Upritchard: I Can't Help the Whole World Heal."



Figure 215. Francis Upritchard, *Here Comes Everybody* (detail), 2022. Bronze.

Upritchard, seeking methods of working across a variety of materials, has also experimented with *shibuichi*. *Shibuichi* is metal alloy that consists of one part silver, three parts copper, with a molten point of 770°C. Traditionally used in Japan to decorate metals tools such as knives and swords, it is now relatively common in jewellery-making practices. Upritchard has experimented with this material in several instances. When asked if various materials hold meaning or explicit connotations for her, she replies “it’s more about something I pick up and I feel really drawn to.”²⁷⁷

²⁷⁷ Giblin. “The Borrowings of Francis Upritchard.”

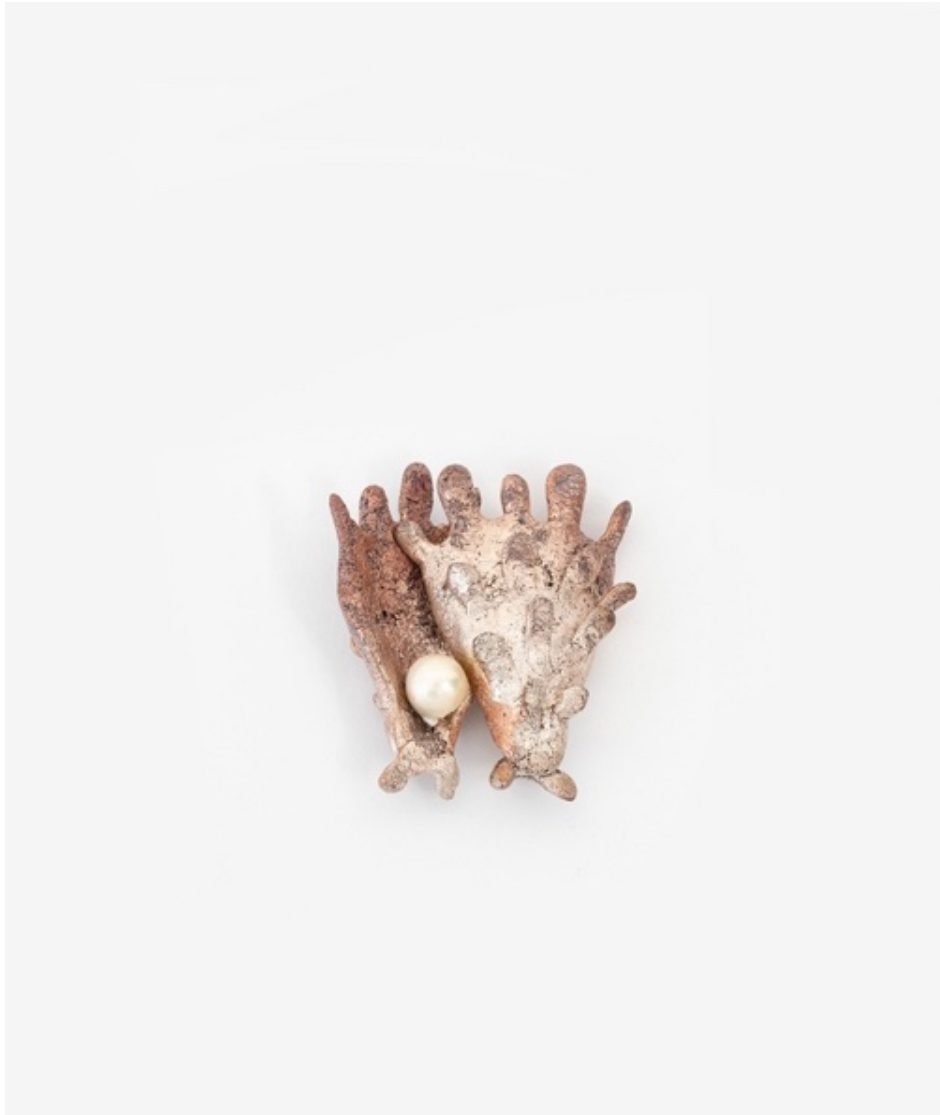


Figure 216. Francis Upritchard, *Venus Shell with Pearl*, 2021. Shibuichi (93% copper, 7% silver), pearl, 1.8 x 4.8 x 5.3cm.

Upritchard equally diffuses hierarchies between mediums, often collaborating with other makers to expanding the material vocabulary of her work, as well as working with artists and designers such as glass artist Jochen Holz and her designer husband, Martino Gamper. “[I’m] always adjusting to new materials, because I’m fascinated by materials and love working out how to work with them,”²⁷⁸ she says. Her practice dissolves boundaries between art and craft. She shares “I’ve always had a big problem with the hierarchy within

²⁷⁸ Hald. “Artist Francis Upritchard: I Can’t Help the Whole World Heal.”

art, craft, jewellery, design; I think it's weird and silly."²⁷⁹ Upritchard's use of glass and ceramic foregrounds their ties to utility and craftsmanship, often adopting the vessel form. She frequently employs vessel surfaces to support broader exhibition narratives, referencing mythological figures such as Sisyphus²⁸⁰. By merging drawing with decorative surfaces on ceramics and glass, Upritchard deepens the narrative qualities that run through her practice.



Figure 217. Francis Upritchard, *Sydney Scallop*, 2022. Exhibition detail, Fine Arts, Sydney.

Her use of various materials and forms that evade specific temporal definition is her way of expressing “that humans are all the same, ancient or modern, black or white.”²⁸¹ The fusion of traditional craft materials (glass, ceramic, textile) with fine art mediums (such as bronze, painting, and drawing) aligns with her broader investigation of the human condition and the objects that shape cultural heritage.

²⁷⁹ Luke. “Francis Upritchard: The Confessions of a Magpie Kiwi.”

²⁸⁰ In Greek mythology, Sisyphus was condemned to eternally roll a rock uphill, only for it to roll back down; an unending punishment described by Homer in the *Odyssey*.

²⁸¹ Vanc. “Francis Upritchard.”



Figure 218. Francis Upritchard, *Paper, Creature, Stone*, 2022. Installation view, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū.

Newby's work with clay and glass is marked by her characteristic intuitive responsiveness to site and environment. Her engagement with found materials such as broken glass and discarded sidewalk debris displays an attempt of material attentiveness, where materials are collected and allowed to participate in the work's final form, a sentiment that echoes New Materialism's ethos. She is drawn to "materials behaving in ways [she] find[s] interesting and usually found in peripheral places."²⁸² Newby emphasises working with materials found onsite, integrating them into her installations in a way that feels continuous with the surrounding environment. On this collecting process, she says: "It's a refused material readily available; it's almost like cleaning in an insignificant way."²⁸³ Her casual approach allows the material's inherent properties to interact with natural elements.

²⁸² Newby. "Casualness", 12.

²⁸³ Simonini. "An Interview with Kate Newby." 36-41.

For *Hours in wind* (figs 219&220) at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Newby utilized hand-blown glass components (made at Canberra Glassworks) suspended alongside shipping ropes sourced locally from Sydney Ferries. This aerial composition was designed to interact with the harbour's climatic conditions, with the glass elements refracting light and casting ephemeral shadows that shifted hourly. Newby articulated her intent, stating, "I wanted to work with materials that were all somehow activated by the conditions of the site. The glass will refract light and change depending on the time of day or night. The rope will swing in the wind, the bronze will patina and oxidise with the salt air and the rope will cast different shadows depending on the time of day."²⁸⁴ She adds, "I liked the idea of a project that would change over time. Working with these materials allows for some transformation. It will feel very different on a cloudy or rainy day, or on a clear night. In a way, the weather conditions are as much a part of the work as the bronze, rope or glass."²⁸⁵ This approach underscores her commitment to creating works that evolve in dialogue with their surroundings, embodying a temporal sensitivity that engages with the subtleties of environmental change.

²⁸⁴ MCA Australia. "MCA Australia Unveils Kate Newby's Loti Smorgon Sculpture Terrace Commission for 2024." news release, 2024.

²⁸⁵ MCA Australia. "MCA Australia Unveils Kate Newby's Loti Smorgon Sculpture Terrace Commission"



Figure 219. Kate Newby, *Hours in wind*, 2024. Cast glass, hot-worked glass, bronze, salvaged rope.



Figure 220. Kate Newby, *Hours in wind* (details), 2024. Cast glass, hot-worked glass, bronze, salvaged rope, dimensions variable.

Newby created a similar installation - *Cold Water* (figs 221&222) - for the 2025 Sharjah Biennial, where organically shaped glass components were strung with recycled rope from an architectural frame.



Figure 221. Kate Newby, *Cold Water*, 2025. Installation view, Sharjah Biennial 16, Kalba Ice Factory, Kalba.



Figure 222. Kate Newby, *Cold Water (detail)*, 2025. Installation view, Sharjah Biennial 16, Kalba Ice Factory, Kalba.

Newby's window works further extend her use of glass, drawing from and subverting the narrative function of stained glass whilst engaging with spatial peripheries. By replacing conventional panes with coloured or textured glass, she challenges the clarity and containment typically expected of architectural glazing, blurring the boundary between interior and exterior. For *You wish. you wish* (fig.223), Galerie Art Concept (Newby's French gallery) describes the windows as "improved scrap: holes, distortions and voluntary defects which jeopardize the functionality of the stained-glass windows and counterbalance the virtuosity of the glassmakers."²⁸⁶ This framing exposes a tension. While the works gesture toward the storytelling traditions of stained glass, they resist narrative coherence and technical virtuosity, expressing a refusal of both craft mastery and architectural authority.



Figure 223. Kate Newby, *You wish. You wish.*, 2022. Glass tiles tinted with *jaune d'argent* (silver yellow stain), 33 x 33cm each, produced with the Ateliers Loire, added to the Palais de Tokyo's front door, during the group exhibition *Réclamer la terre* ('Reclaim the earth'), 2022, Paris.

²⁸⁶ "Kate Newby: The Edge of Earth / You Wish. You Wish, 2022, Palais De Tokyo, Paris." Galerie Art Concept, 2022, accessed 20 May 2025, <https://www.galerieartconcept.com/en/kate-newby-the-edge-of-earth-you-wish-you-wish-2022-palais-de-tokyo-paris-fr/>.

The incorporation of glass and clay into contemporary art practices signifies a growing convergence between craft and fine art, where materials historically tied to function are recontextualised for their formal and conceptual potential. This shift reflects renewed recognition of both technical skill and material potential. Newby also utilises clay as a palimpsest to record gestures, movements, participation within an environment. Clay is a material of profound responsiveness, an immensely haptic medium poised between states of liquidity, plasticity, and permanence. The selection of clay as a primary material is a tactile engagement with a medium that is elemental, and encoded with cultural, historical, and conceptual weight. Unlike industrially produced materials that often resist evidence of touch, clay holds an indexical relationship to the body. The act of kneading, pressing, coiling, throwing, and reconstructing is embedded into its very form, producing a sensibility of presence. It exists between states of malleability and permanence, affirming its capacity to crack, erode, or be reconstituted. It registers time in a way that few other materials do. It is a material that embodies paradox - ancient and contemporary, fragile and durable, immediate and slow. This dialectic of material memory and transformation is central to how contemporary artists such as Newby achieve the crafted ephemerality. Such work foregrounds its capacity to record, mutate, and accumulate meaning over time.

Newby explores clay across varied scales, from expansive tile and brick installations that activate floors, walls, roofs, and hillsides, to smaller, casually pinched forms scattered across floors. She describes her process as being “more interested in experiences than outcomes,”²⁸⁷ suggesting that the work is led by the material, rather than by strict artistic intent. This ethos is evident in her practice of embedding found debris - glass shards, stones, and fragments of urban detritus - into soft clay before firing, allowing the material to house

²⁸⁷ West, Linnea, “Phone Tag: Interview with Kate Newby,” 2017, <https://linneawest.com/phone-tag-interview-with-kate-newby/>.

these collected elements as an index of time and place. The resulting surfaces retain a sense of embedded history through the physical imprints of the locations in which she works. A contemporary ceramic precedent to this notion is Sterling Ruby's *Basin Theology* series (fig.224), which incorporates ceramic fragments and components from previous ceramic projects, re-glazed and fired as a cohesive whole. Ruby describes the series as "a kind of archaeology of time,"²⁸⁸ with each basin catching "all the entrapments of the pieces that had blown up...the failures of the past."²⁸⁹



Figure 224. Sterling Ruby, *Basin Theology/SACRUM SACRAL*, 2017. Ceramic, 50.8 x 167.6 x 109.2cm.

Newby's approach resonates with that of Ruby, particularly in her incorporation of studio detritus and residual gestures of making, situating both practices within the theoretical framework of New Materialism. "My work requires a lot of first, quick responses,"²⁹⁰ Newby

²⁸⁸ Ruby, Sterling. "Sterling Ruby Discussing Basin Theology." Nasher Sculpture Centre. 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKelI90pAHY>.

²⁸⁹ Ruby. "Sterling Ruby Discussing Basin Theology."

²⁹⁰ Simonini. "An Interview with Kate Newby." 36-41.

shares. Her bricks and tiles often retain evidence of their handling, allowing incidental marks, irregular edges, and imperfections to become part of the final work. There is an emphasis on formlessness rather than representation. Many of Newby's ceramic works consist of small interventions embedded within larger installations, such as tile or brick assemblages. Works such as *singing and piping* (fig.225) and *Grows and grows on you* (fig.226) eschew formal or functional convention; instead, they foreground gesture and surface through their deliberate formlessness and lack of utility. The clay serves as a temporal index, capturing traces of movement, urban detritus, and incidental encounters. In its vitrified state, its materiality preserves the ephemeral logic of errantry and transient interaction - core concerns in Newby's practice.



Figure 225. Kate Newby, *singing and piping*, 2024. Stoneware, glaze, sand, found glass, 101.6 x 101.6 x 3.8cm.



Figure 226. Kate Newby, *Grows and grows on you*, 2021. Clay, collected broken glass (3,700 pieces), dimensions variable. Installation view, Museum of Contemporary Art of Haute-Vienne - Château de Rochechouart.

As an artist working in clay, I have cultivated a sustained engagement with the medium, often exploring its capacity to capture gesture, individuality, and both chance and mastery within its form and surface. In examining Newby's approach to clay, I observe a distinct departure from many of these material qualities. While she emphasises the raw, physical encounter with material, her installations often rely on a repeated formal vocabulary - bricks, tiles, and embedded found objects - across different locations, with limited material evolution. Her use of industrially produced materials such as bricks and tiles creates a distance from the tactile, transformative nature traditionally associated with ceramics, which raises questions about sustainability and the necessity of large-scale material production.

There is a tension within her practice between material sensitivity and repetition. While she speaks of allowing materials to guide the work, her approach frequently reiterates familiar formal and processual strategies. Although her installations are site-responsive, the volume of materials involved introduces concerns regarding their afterlife, including storage,

de-installation, and eventual disposal. These are considerations I have encountered in my own practice, and I imagine many other artists grapple with them as well. Newby's approach presents a case study in the complexities of material ethics within contemporary practice.

Newby's quest for immediacy in her working method is no different for her works in bronze. Bronze has an enduring presence in the history of sculpture; it is steeped in traditions of monumentality, permanence and technical mastery. Its connotations stretch back to antiquity, where it was used for commemorative statuary, weaponry, and ritual objects that signified power and endurance. While historically positioned as a material of prestige, and often associated with classical and academic sculptural traditions, contemporary artists engage with bronze in ways that challenge its associations with permanence and hierarchy. Newby appreciates bronze ability to record rough gestures and traces of hasty manipulation. Newby approaches bronze with her distinct casualness that further unsettles its historical gravitas. For her exhibition, *try doing anything without it* at Galerie Art: Concept, Newby produced a series of bronze plates that replaced functional metal grates on sections of the pavement outside the gallery (figs 227-229). This gesture of placing works beyond the conventional boundaries of exhibition space and into the public realm (where they may be encountered by passersby rather than gallery visitors) is characteristic of Newby's practice. Their discreet placement underfoot requires a downward gaze or a wandering attention. Their subtlety appears intentional and by replacing elements so mundane and utilitarian, her artistic intervention verges on imperceptibility. This ephemerality and nonchalance are central to the work's sensibility. She confesses "they're made in a pretty DIY way. I didn't know how to make them and I often don't know how to make my work and I throw myself into process..."²⁹¹ This statement underscores the ephemeral, haptic, and experimental nature of both Newby's process and its outcomes. Bronze traditionally connotes endurance,

²⁹¹ Teets. "Kate Newby."

permanence, and mastery; yet Newby subverts these associations, infusing the material with her signature insouciance.



Figure 227. Kate Newby, *try doing anything without it*, 2022. Installation view, Galerie Art: Concept, Paris.



Figure 228. Kate Newby, *5 minutes to everywhere*, 2022. Bronze, 19.5 x 54 x 0.4 cm.



Figure 229. Kate Newby, *GET OFF THE SHED*, 2022. Bronze, 19.5 x 54 x 0.4 cm.

Newby's bronze works frequently appear as small interventions, taking form as subtle casts nestled within architectural spaces, or hand-sized objects left to be encountered rather than displayed. This rejection of bronze's monumental legacy aligns with her broader philosophy of casualness, privileging process over mastery and the authoritative presence of classical statuary.

LA-based Australian artist Ricky Swallow, though not part of this research's primary focus, provides a compelling parallel to these concerns. Departing from traditional sculptural tropes, he casts assemblages of quotidian objects - cardboard tubes, wood, ropes, chairs, spirit levels - into bronze, transforming the ephemeral into the permanent. His work foregrounds a surrealist sensibility, one that draws energy from the strangeness embedded in the everyday, not dissimilar to Armanious's way of working. Swallow interrogates the assumed preciousness of the medium through his use of everyday objects, suggesting that what is deemed 'worthy' of preservation is always contingent. His practice reveals an irony within

bronze casting: the ability to make something playful and fleeting become enduring and heavy, exposing the tensions between material transformation and conceptual weight.

Spirit #1 (fig.230) playfully subverts the logic of a utilitarian object by reimagining the spirit level - an instrument typically associated with precision, standardisation, and neutrality. In Swallow's iteration, the level's functional vials are replaced with cast chestnut cowrie shells, introducing a symbolic charge. The insertion of the cowrie shells - traditionally linked to femininity, fertility, and currency across various cultures - destabilises the object's industrial rationality and invites a reconsideration of what constitutes value and balance. Rather than privileging technical measurement, the work gestures toward alternative modes of calibration rooted in ecological, cultural, and spiritual systems of meaning. This reconfiguration exemplifies Swallow's broader interest in evoking a surrealist tone by re-assembling quotidian, readymade elements and unsettling conventional distinctions between sculpture and tool, or ornament and function.



Figure 230. Ricky Swallow, *Spirit #1*, 2024. Patinated bronze, 6.3 x 90.8 x 2.5cm.

His work operates as an open-ended inquiry where formal experimentation intersects with quotidian references. In this sense, Swallow's approach bears affinities with Armanious's, particularly in their shared commitment to the transfiguration of everyday objects through casting and assemblage. While working with different materials (bronze for Swallow, resin for Armanious), both artists subvert normative expectations of objecthood, context and perceptive logic - inviting viewers to inhabit new, often disorienting relationships with familiar things. The act of casting itself remains central to the discussion of bronze, as it introduces a necessary distance between artist and final form. Unlike other sculptural material processes, bronze requires a rigorous process of translating the original form into wax, moulds, then casting in bronze. The final object is always an echo of its original state rather than an immediate articulation of the artist's hand.

Extending this interest in material transformation and the everyday, Newby's practice engages the quotidian not only as subject matter but as method - foregrounding lived experience, informal gestures, and accumulative acts of participation. Her works often emerge from durational engagement with context, where meaning accrues through the encounter. While on a residency in Worpswede, Germany, she embarked on a project to "sew the world's biggest cotton picnic blanket."²⁹² She recounts, "I (had) a mass of fabric with me... and decided not to do anything but live with it for as long as possible before I had to exhibit it. My project started as a substantial amount of thin gauzy cotton laid out in the garden where my neighbours ate on it, took it swimming in the peat-drenched river close by, and left it out in the rain to wash away some stains; then the living and staining would start over."²⁹³ By integrating the material into the rituals of daily life - eating, swimming, weathering - Newby dissolves the boundary between artwork and world, privileging the

²⁹² Newby. "Casualness", 57.

²⁹³ Newby. "Casualness", 57.

residue of shared experience. For this specific exhibition Newby felt that the piece remained precarious in its grotty nature, but it was in dialogue with other works that lacked the rawness and human contact of the cotton piece. Newby adds, “the cotton felt like it had been doing something before it landed itself in my exhibition. It was a vague form of social documentation, tracking - through stains - my time spent in the most ordinary of activities.”²⁹⁴ The fabric became a living archive, marked by interaction and the subtle erosions of use, elevating the everyday through attention.



Figure 231. Kate Newby, *Crawl out your window*, 2010. Installation view, Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst GAK, Bremen, Germany.

Newby’s picnic blanket echoes the stained and used items preserved in Mary Kelly’s *Post-Partum Document* (fig.232), where she formed a sort of lived archive of her mother-child relationship with her son. The body of work, installed in six parts (one for each year of the first six years of her son’s life) included stained or used baby clothes, diaper linings, feeding charts, drawings, writings and recordings. *Post-Partum Document* extends beyond

²⁹⁴ Newby. “Casualness”, 58.

personal documentation to critically examine the formation of identity and subjectivity through the experience of motherhood - a process historically marginalised within the canon of art. This alignment highlights why many artists who work with readymades aim not only to engage critically with established artistic forms, but also to push beyond conventional art contexts. In doing so, they foreground the relational, the lived, and the materially embedded dimensions of experience that resist formal or institutional containment.

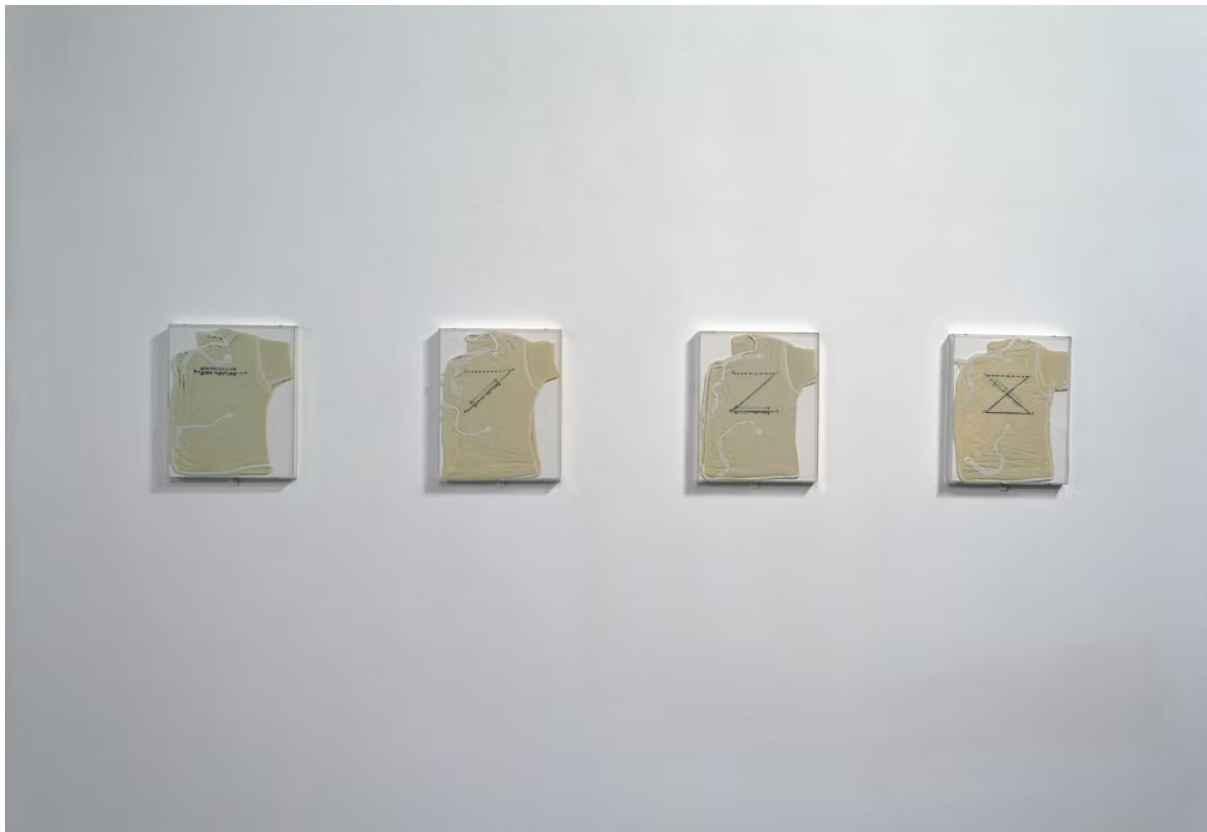


Figure 232. Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Introduction*, 1973. Perspex units, white card, wool vests, pencil, ink, (4 units) 20.3 x 25.4cm each.

In her GAK exhibition, Newby also installed a sloping expanse of sky-blue concrete, with crystals, beer caps, and found rocks embedded in its surface. The surface is rough, with marks and impressions of hands, footprints, wheels, rope, and other gestures denoting the act of making it. Amidst the litter-like shrapnel and gestures the viewer gains a sense of the actions undergone to create the installation. Newby purposely installed the work at a sloping angle, as slopes are something we navigate daily, yet very rarely in art galleries. This decision

to disrupt the expected was to inspire more attention from the viewer to both their surroundings as well as their perceptions and expectations. Newby shares her goal for this work was “to speak to an experience of daily living without making any great claim to change anything. My work doesn’t invent anything. It simply ghosts or mimics the things I absorb and notice around me.”²⁹⁵



Figure 233. Kate Newby, *Crawl out your window*, 2010. Installation view, Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst GAK, Bremen, Germany.

Fiona Connor’s *Continuous Sidewalk* (fig.234) establishes a clear dialogue with Newby’s blue slope, both in material sensibility and conceptual orientation. Like Newby, Connor is a New Zealand-born artist who relocated to the United States - moving to Los Angeles to pursue further study after graduating from Elam. Her sculptural practice centres on processes of replication and facsimile, through which familiar objects and environments are subtly destabilised. This approach foregrounds the formal, social, and psychological

²⁹⁵ Newby. “Casualness”, 58.

dimensions embedded within shared public spaces. As Connor notes, she is “quite interested in things coming in and out of focus in terms of their thing-ness,”²⁹⁶ underscoring her interest in the shifting perceptual status of objects. Connor often reproduces utilitarian structures - such as noticeboards - to interrogate their social functions and the “decentralisation of messaging and content.”²⁹⁷ *Continuous Sidewalk* comprises replicated segments of the Los Angeles Civic Centre’s pavement, reassembled as a seamless surface within the artist’s studio. Installed as a continuous surface on the floor of her studio, the composition registers the decay, entropy and accretion of time and contact, imparting a relational perspective. In doing so, it exposes the latent networks of memory and association that materialise within the most ordinary elements of the built environment.



Figure 234. Fiona Connor, *Continuous Sidewalk*, 2023.

²⁹⁶ Hadland, Gracie. “Fiona Connor Sparks a Print Renaissance.” 2021. <https://www.culturedmag.com/article/2021/07/09/fiona-connor-print-renaissance>.

²⁹⁷ Hadland. “Fiona Connor Sparks a Print Renaissance.”

Both Newby and Connor's resistance to monumentalising - to "make any great claim"²⁹⁸ - is precisely what grants the quotidian its potential for transcendence in these artists' practices. Rather than staging the everyday as spectacle, it functions as a mainstream conduit, exposing the latent networks of memory and association that materialise within the most ordinary elements of daily life. These artists extend the legacies of New Materialism and Arte Povera through contemporary lenses, whether by mapping ancient cosmic debris, reactivating overlooked detritus, or translating speculative systems into tactile forms. In all cases, material is charged, contingent, and alive with political and poetic possibility.

The diverse range of materials and scales employed across these practices reveals distinct modalities of making, each unlocking affective, conceptual and spatial dynamics. Variations in scale, for instance, can introduce a sense of grandeur or intimacy, while the use of tactile or fluid materials (such as clay and glass) allows for both functional and non-functional outcomes that often subvert the historical expectations associated with each medium. These materials carry longstanding associations with craft, positioning them within ongoing dialogues around museological framing, institutional critique, and the boundaries between art and utility. Bronze, traditionally aligned with endurance and monumentality, complicates these boundaries further. Within the practices discussed, it is deployed to capture ephemeral gestures, intimate surfaces, or seemingly casual assemblages - simultaneously suggesting pliability and permanence. The recurrent use of quotidian materials and found objects signals a broader desire to embed contemporary life within the sculptural field. This impulse spans a spectrum; from Armanious's meticulous replication of everyday detritus to the more associative strategies of Langdon-Pole and Upritchard, who employ vessels, puzzle pieces, and other charged readymades to interrogate cultural value systems and historical narratives. What emerges is a shared recognition that material is not neutral but active; it

²⁹⁸ Newby. "Casualness", 58.

carries embedded content, cultural associations, and aesthetic histories. Increasingly, matter is understood as vibrant and agentic; its properties, transformations, and resistances becoming central to meaning-making.

2.2 Processes: Embodied and Tacit Knowledge

In many cases, the act of working with a material becomes catalytic - process itself initiates new ideas, whether through participatory actions, recycling and reuse, gestural exploration, or experimental fabrication. For these artists, process is not simply a means to an end, but an epistemological tool that generates form, fosters critical engagement, and reconfigures the understanding of materials and their place in contemporary art.

The concepts of tacit knowledge and embodied knowledge are crucial to artistic practice. Scholars in philosophy, phenomenology, and cognitive science - such as Michael Polanyi, Merleau-Ponty, and John Dewey - have explored these ideas in relation to artistic creation and perception. Artists working with tactile mediums often share affinities on the connection between medium and maker; particularly with materials where the body functions as a tool in the making process. Artists working in physical forms (such as sculptors) must contend with the bodily limitations and possibilities that this entails. An artist's height, arm span, strength, and coordination all influence the work. There is no doubt that such movements (and embodied knowledge) are stored and refined over the course of a sculptural practice. Knowledge and awareness are strengthened through both making and viewing of exhibitions, shaped by how works are installed and presented.

Tacit knowledge, a term introduced by Michael Polanyi in *The Tacit Dimension* (1966), refers to the kind of deeply embedded knowledge that resists articulation but is essential to skilful action. Unlike explicit knowledge which can be documented and transmitted, tacit knowledge is embodied, situational, and absorbed through practice. It

shapes our perceptions, skills, and interactions in ways that words cannot fully capture. Tacit knowledge could be present in material sensibility (an intuitive understanding of material through repeated engagement), technique and gesture (acquired through practice and time), and aesthetic judgement (decisions regarding composition, balance, and form are often guided by an implicit understanding rather than explicit rationalisation). It is also present in the viewer when engaging with and interpreting an artwork, and in all individuals as one navigates the physical world. Polanyi's assertion, "We know more than we can tell,"²⁹⁹ underscores how one can hold an awareness of these physical, material, and haptic details beyond words, sometimes subconsciously. Tacit knowledge and embodied knowledge are closely related, though not the same. Tacit knowledge is broader in scope, encompassing all forms of understanding that are difficult to express or formalise. Embodied knowledge, by contrast, refers more specifically to knowledge rooted in physical experience and bodily action.

Embodied knowledge extends beyond tacit awareness to describe how the body itself 'knows' and participates in meaning-making. This idea is closely associated with Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), which argues that knowledge is not only intellectual but also sensorimotor and pre-reflective. He declares the "body is the common texture of all objects and is, at least with regard to the perceived world, the general instrument of understanding."³⁰⁰ This positioning of the body as an instrument or tool is paramount to sculptural practice. Additionally, he writes about consciousness of gaze, and the conditioned viewer - "I treat my own perceptual history as a result of my relations with the objective world"³⁰¹ - echoing ideas articulated by Irwin regarding the conditioning of perception.

²⁹⁹ Polanyi, Michael. *The Tacit Dimension*. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1983, 4.

³⁰⁰ Merleau-Ponty and Landes. *Phenomenology of Perception*, 244.

³⁰¹ Merleau-Ponty and Landes. *Phenomenology of Perception*, 73.

Dewey, in *Art as Experience* (1934), further emphasised the continuity between making and experiencing art, highlighting that knowledge is not separate from doing, but emerges through action and sensory engagement. Dewey professes that the aesthetic is a primary, fundamental and pervasive feature of the natural world, whereas traditional art objects are secondary. He also places strong emphasis on experience and the everyday aesthetic qualities that imbue it. Dewey foregrounds the intrinsic connection between art and daily life, aiming to “restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognised to constitute experience.”³⁰² This sentiment proliferates in practices that foreground quotidian experience, such as Armanious’s works, Newby’s participatory installations, and Langdon-Pole’s use of readymades.

London-based artist, master potter and writer, Edmund de Waal has contributed to contemporary understandings of embodied knowledge through his practice, research, and writing. De Waal possesses a remarkably intuitive understanding of the emotional and historical resonance carried by objects. His works - whether crafted from clay, porcelain, or stone - are infused with echoes of distant ancestors, forgotten narratives, and philosophical reflection. His installations often evoke the presence of personal and collective histories. They are curated assemblies intended to prompt reflection or stir emotion, much like artifacts in an archive or books in a library. De Waal frequently explores how objects can serve as vessels for memory - how their material presence, provenance, and craftsmanship all contribute to their capacity to hold and transmit meaning.

³⁰² Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. New York: Minton, Balch & Co., 1934, 9.



Figure 235. Edmund de Waal, *letters home*, 2024. Installation view, Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin.



Figure 236. Edmund de Waal, *the burning now (detail)*, 2023. Installation view, CLAY Museum of Ceramic Art, Denmark.

Over the decades, and through the making of tens of thousands of vessels, de Waal has established himself internationally as a leading figure in ceramics, and he shares his perspectives on making and viewing objects through his written work, curated exhibitions and other projects. He often reflects on the sensory and temporal connections embedded in the act of encountering (or holding) an object. He acknowledges the pulse of an object. Giving a Song³⁰³ bowl (fig.237) as an example; he considers how it's made, but also how its material qualities evoke a palpable sense of its journey through time.



Figure 237. Unknown maker, *Southern Song dynasty bowl*, 12-13th century. Porcelain with celadon glaze (Qingbai ware), 7 x 18.4 x 18.4cm.

De Waal's book *The White Road: A Journey into an Obsession* (2015) maps his physical and emotional journey tracing the history of porcelain. Throughout the text he ruminates on touch, repetition, and the bodily rhythm of throwing, highlighting how embodied knowledge is central to working with clay. He also writes about "haptic

³⁰³ Song dynasty (960-1279 AD), China.

knowledge, the ways in which it is possible to know something complex without having the need, or the means, to articulate it in language.”³⁰⁴

In 2016, he co-curated the exhibition *Kneaded Knowledge: The Language of Ceramics* with Ai Wei Wei, held at the Universalmuseum Joanneum, Graz (fig.238). This exhibition exemplified the concept of embodied knowledge as it manifests in clay, with de Waal’s reflections offering particularly salient insights into the phenomenon. He combines the perspectives of maker and curator, offering a nuanced understanding of material experience, that has been enriched by his knowledge of history, philosophy, and language. De Waal describes the exhibition as a series of conversations across more than a thousand years, between people that have made vessels, and people that have made sculpture, East and West, all working with clay. The curation conveyed a historical resonance, expressing the embodied knowledge of the makers evident in the works. The exhibition featured pieces by Ai Weiwei, Edmund de Waal, Lynda Benglis, Alison Britton, Hans Coper, Lucio Fontana, Asger Jorn, Kazimir Malevich, Fausto Melotti, Joan Miró, Isamu Noguchi, Pablo Picasso, Lucie Rie, Marit Tingleff, and Peter Voulkos.

³⁰⁴ De Waal, Edmund. *The White Road: Journey into an Obsession*. London: Chatto & Windus, 2015, 138.



Figure 238. *Kneaded Knowledge*, 2016. Installation view, CLAY Museum of Ceramic Art, Denmark.

De Waal elucidates a sentiment of those who work with clay, expressing “we’ve reached down, picked up a bit of the earth, and made something.”³⁰⁵ He also speaks expressively about embodied knowledge in relation to this exhibition, saying “human beings acquire knowledge from the day they are born, through their bodies, through their touch, through all their senses. To be [a] human being is to be alive through all this knowledge.”³⁰⁶ He adds, “Those kinds of knowledge are very important to remember, that knowledge comes through our body, through our senses. [In the works included in this exhibition] we can see hands working, we can see bodies working.”³⁰⁷ All knowledge is inherently embodied, formed through the body’s role in perception and experience. The visual artist operates as both tacit thinker and embodied practitioner, translating concept into form through material

³⁰⁵ Kunsthau Graz. “Interview with Edmund De Waal for “Kneaded Knowledge”.” 2016. <https://www.edmunddewaal.com/resources/video-audio/interview-with-edmund-de-waal-for-kneaded-knowledge>.

³⁰⁶ Kunsthau Graz. “Interview with Edmund De Waal for “Kneaded Knowledge”

³⁰⁷ Kunsthau Graz. “Interview with Edmund De Waal for “Kneaded Knowledge”

engagement, movement, and sensory intuition. This embodied knowledge bridges intellectual conceptualisation and physical execution, lending the work its affective and experiential force. De Waal's practice - spanning making, writing, exhibiting, and the integration of libraries, epistemologies, installations, singular artworks, and curated projects - reflects the multivalency that defines much of contemporary art. His origins as a potter chart an aspirational trajectory, emblematic of a broader shift toward multidisciplinary, collaborative, and curatorial modes of working that enable artists to more fully articulate their ideas and concerns. De Waal's approach exemplifies how the embodied knowledge of a craft-based medium like ceramics can evolve into a generative material and conceptual resource across diverse forms. His practice resonates with the material multivalency evident in the selected artists - mirrored in the site-responsive installations of Ward Knox and Newby, and in the epistemological inquiries pursued by Carmody, Upritchard, and Langdon-Pole.

Newby's practice provides a compelling entry point to consider tacit and embodied knowledge - particularly as these forms of knowing emerge through spatial engagement, material experimentation, and gestures of subtle intervention. Her installations are often sited both indoors and out and are openly responsive to their immediate environments. She frequently uses the site itself or its surrounding context to influence what is made and how it is presented. She reflects, "I'm not sure when art is about thinking and when it's about feeling. I think through doing things."³⁰⁸ This sentiment aligns with de Waal's reflections on acquiring knowledge through tactile engagement, signalling an investment in experiential and embodied processes. Newby describes her process as improvisational, "digressive in tone and mobile in mood,"³⁰⁹ emphasising that her work emerges not from mastery but from a kind of alert wandering. "I'm really ok with not making decisions,"³¹⁰ she states, "I don't need

³⁰⁸ Simonini. "An Interview with Kate Newby." 36-41.

³⁰⁹ Newby. "Casualness", 12.

³¹⁰ Teets. "Kate Newby."

[decisions] to be visual, I need them to be more about process.”³¹¹ This reflects a Fluxus sensibility, prioritising action over refinement. As she affirms, “I don’t want to refine what I know. I don’t want to complicate it.”³¹²

Newby’s intentional distancing from mastery may be viewed as a kind of resistance to technical authority. She openly embraces a beginner’s mindset, describing her approach to materials with curiosity rather than certainty: “I try to come at materials blindly, like glass and clay. I give myself permission to go into a glass studio and know nothing. I can just play around with glass frit and make choices.”³¹³ While this allows for freedom and spontaneity, it may also limit the depth of material engagement. Newby frequently relies on the assistance of skilled craftspeople - ceramicists, glassblowers, brick and tile makers - to realise her works. Although outsourced fabrication is integral to many contemporary practices, the absence of deeper material inquiry across projects raises questions about how embodied knowledge accumulates or transforms over time. Her stated aversion to material refinement proclaims a methodology that privileges process over resolution, openness over expertise. From a maker’s perspective, this can be seen as both liberating and potentially superficial. While Newby’s curiosity is palpable, her installations often repeat similar gestures with little variation, leading to a sense of conceptual and material stasis. For example, Newby’s 2022 installation at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris (figs 200&239) featured a contained arrangement of industrial bricks, scratched and inscribed by the artist before firing. These standard bricks, produced by Ateliers Rairies-Montrieux in the Loire Valley, bore subtle gestures that disrupted their uniformity. Presented as part of the group exhibition *Réclamer la Terre (Reclaim the Earth)*, the work echoed the show’s ecological ethos. However, the

³¹¹ Tee. “Kate Newby.”

³¹² Simonini. “An Interview with Kate Newby.” 36-41.

³¹³ Simonini. “An Interview with Kate Newby.” 36-41.

installation's context - sunken and inaccessible - prevented physical interaction, positioning the brick surface as visually and symbolically superior to the surrounding stone forecourt. Paradoxically, their vitrified, fired state ensured they could never return to the earth, complicating the work's alignment with the exhibition's call for ecological reclamation.



Figure 239. Kate Newby, *The edge of the earth*, 2022. Bricks, mortar (produced with the support of Rairies-Montrieux). Installation view, *Réclamer la Terre*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris.



Figure 240. Film still of Kate Newby by Jennifer Teets for Galerie Art Concept, 2021.

Newby installed a similar work (albeit accessible) for her exhibition *YES TOMORROW* at Adam Art Gallery in Wellington (fig.241). The work employs a similar process - industrially-made terracotta tiles with rudimentary gestures scraped into the surface. The marks are similar to the latter gestures of *Réclamer la Terre* and seem to express bodily movements of sweeping arm spans, or mimicking puddles through dug-out impressions and cavities. The exhibition text notes, “Her modus operandi requires her to rely on local knowledge, building networks of helpers to share in her efforts, but also testing audiences’ expectations about what is proper to the art experience.”³¹⁴ While this repetition of process may be intentional - engaging with ideas of iteration, communal effort, and the disruption of mastery - it raises concerns about an apparent lack of deeper material inquiry. Though many artists embrace repetition and gesture as strategies, and much contemporary art occupies space and resources that elevate it above the everyday, the absence of material rigour or

³¹⁴ Gallery, Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art. “Kate Newby: Yes Tomorrow.” news release, 2021, <https://www.adamartgallery.nz/exhibitions/archive/2021/yes-tomorrow>.

sustained knowledge-building in Newby's approach raises critical questions about artistic responsibility and depth.



Figure 241. Kate Newby, *You got to write a song and I got to be in it*, 2021. Terracotta tiles. Installation view, *YES TOMORROW*, Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery, Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington.

Much of Newby's work incorporates mass-produced or industrial materials - particularly bricks and tiles - which are technically ceramic, but do not invite the same kind of expressive exploration that working with raw clay often does. Despite the frequent invocation of clay in her interviews and descriptions, the material presence in her work leans more toward building materials than the more intimate, responsive qualities associated with ceramic practice. While each installation responds to a specific site, the gestures, materials, and forms employed often remain consistent. This raises the questions: what becomes of these works once an exhibition ends? What happens to the hundreds or thousands of mass-produced bricks and tiles? And with each iteration, what - if anything - is learned, altered, or refined? These considerations are significant for an artist and are likely to arise in the minds of discerning viewers.

Newby articulates her engagement with materials in highly gestural and tactile terms, saying, “I make marks by stabbing, scraping, carving; as well I push pieces of broken glass that I have picked up off the sidewalk into the unfired brick. With the clay works I am throwing the clay on the ground, onto objects around the area that I am working, and I’m collecting these marks. Sometimes debris gets burned into the clay too. So I’m not really doing anything.”³¹⁵ This statement highlights a key tension in her practice. On one hand, there is an active bodily involvement in the process - throwing, pressing, embedding - but on the other, she downplays her role in shaping or controlling the outcome. She adds, “I’m just performing an action. There’s not a lot of craft involved. But I’m completely active. My work is about putting myself into situations where anything can happen. I’m not doing a lot, but I am fully immersed in the process.”³¹⁶ The embodied knowledge here is performative and gestural.

One might ask whether Newby sees herself as a crafts person at all, or more as a facilitator of events - a kind of performance artist who enacts an encounter between material, context, and chance. With repetition comes the risk of becoming formulaic. The impression of spontaneity or openness may be undercut by a predictability of outcome. Crucially, the ecological implications of transporting heavy, mass-produced materials across international sites - without clarity on their afterlife - add further complexity to her process-driven ethos. When her exhibition *YES, TOMORROW* at Adam Art Gallery ended, the blue floor work (figs 112&199) was cut up into sections and advertised as free to collect for anyone that wants a piece. However, within *YES TOMORROW*, one work stands out as particularly effective in realising the core concerns of Newby’s practice. Comprising a continuous chain of handmade drain tiles, the piece (figs 242&243) was produced through a collaborative process in which

³¹⁵ Simonini. “An Interview with Kate Newby.” 36-41.

³¹⁶ Simonini. “An Interview with Kate Newby.” 36-41.

wet clay slabs were pressed against the legs of the artist's friends and family, imprinting the body directly into the material. Each tile was individually glazed, with occasional inclusions of found materials such as glass or stone embedded prior to firing. Installed as a sinuous line extending down the hillside from the gallery, the work guides the viewer's gaze through shifting vistas of Wellington and the university campus below. This installation successfully integrates communal making, embodied gesture, and site-responsiveness. It exemplifies a tacit engagement with place, echoing the artist's own process of errantry and wandering. Unlike more static or hermetic works, this piece enacts a form of experiential movement, positioning the viewer within the terrain rather than apart from it. In doing so, it aligns materially and conceptually with Newby's stated interest in collaboration, locality, and the subtle reorientation of everyday perception.



Figure 242. *Kate Newby, Rob Duncan Megan Daniel Margaret Lynn Samuel Deb Nico Marilyn Sarah Henry Mieko Kate Ruth Mike Briana Justine Grace Romesh Josefina Madison Nerissa David Nina Gabrielle Dayle Isabelle Ana Lilith Christian Ruby Sophie Millie Michaela Loretta Laura Christina Alison Olly Miriam Fred Lise Hazel Simon Mia Anita Caroline Anna Prak Nadya Alba Xander Flavia Emma Stef Areez Bella Rachel Kirsty Kate Nicola Emerita Tim Megan Ruby Fina Felixe Ella Eva Ben Julian Bena Huhana Max Lily Tina Rose Bill and Teresa, 2021. Assorted clay, glaze, mortar.*



Figure 243. Kate Newby, *Rob Duncan Megan Daniel Margaret Lynn Samuel Deb Nico Marilyn Sarah Henry Mieko Kate Ruth Mike Briana Justine Grace Romesh Josefina Madison Nerissa David Nina Gabrielle Dayle Isabelle Ana Lilith Christian Ruby Sophie Millie Michaela Loretta Laura Christina Alison Olly Miriam Fred Lise Hazel Simon Mia Anita Caroline Anna Prak Nadya Alba Xander Flavia Emma Stef Areez Bella Rachel Kirsty Kate Nicola Emerita Tim Megan Ruby Fina Felixe Ella Eva Ben Julian Bena Huhana Max Lily Tina Rose Bill and Teresa (detail)*, 2021. Assorted clay, glaze, mortar.

While her rejection of material mastery may limit some aspects of development or resolution, her deep investment in gesture, place, and perception affirms a knowledge anchored in the subtle, the contingent, and the poetic. She has expressed a desire to shift away from exhibition-driven outcomes, focusing instead on direct engagement with the land around her, on her property in Texas. “I’m on this vast amount of land right now,”³¹⁷ she reflects, “and I always ask myself, what could I be exploring here? Why do I need an exhibition to do it? I think I need to buy a really big ladder and just go out there into the fields. I have the things around me that I need.”³¹⁸ With a foundry, glass workshop, and

³¹⁷ Weinberg. “Beyond Site: An Interview with Kate Newby.”

³¹⁸ Weinberg. “Beyond Site: An Interview with Kate Newby.”

ceramic studio already established, her current focus is on what can be explored “for the benefit of the work, not for the exhibition.”³¹⁹

In contrast to Newby’s resistance to embodied knowledge and material mastery, Upritchard employs tacit awareness, while maintaining a deep respect for and understanding of her materials. She possesses an instinctive responsiveness to form and tactility as well as a persistent curiosity for cultural and mythological references, shaped by years of tactile material engagement. Upritchard’s act of making emerges from memory. She notes, “When I’m making my work, it’s not portraiture. I don’t have someone sitting in front of me, and I’m not trying to copy an actual human. I try and embrace how incorrect memory can be.”³²⁰ This process of working from memory is central to the embodied knowledge in her work, allowing distortion, misremembering, and intuition to guide her hands. She does not use reference material, but instead lets her body remember what a hand, a face, or a posture feels like; not aiming for realism, but for presence. She acknowledges the importance of this ambiguity, “I’m working the material in reference to human bodies but remembered human bodies. And for me, it’s quite important that they’re incorrect and they’re not looking just right or just so.”³²¹ This knowing through the body - filtered through memory and sensation - resists universal truths, resulting in sculpture that is suggestive and idiosyncratic.

³¹⁹ Weinberg, “Beyond Site: An Interview with Kate Newby.”

³²⁰ Hal. “Artist Francis Upritchard: I Can’t Help the Whole World Heal.”

³²¹ Hald. “Artist Francis Upritchard: I Can’t Help the Whole World Heal.”



Figure 244. Francis Upritchard, *Three Dinosaur Problem (detail)*, 2024. Balata rubber, steel.

Upritchard's emphasis on embodied gesture aligns with Polanyi's assertion that "we know more than we can tell."³²² Her use of memory-based figuration and conscious embrace of imprecision exemplify a form of tacit knowledge that is bodily, and often pre-verbal. She constructs form through intuitive recall, allowing her own bodily memory and material interaction to guide the work. She explains, "I think of my works not as characters or personalities but as more like husks or costumes,"³²³ suggesting a belief in the viewer's embodied capacity to complete the figure. In this sense, her sculptures invite a participatory recognition grounded in shared, embodied perception. Materials play a crucial role in Upritchard's approach. Her distinction between 'fast' and 'slow' works prompts reflection on how varying tempos and scales shape embodied knowledge. Is a different mode of knowing accessed when making at speed versus through durational slowness? Do certain artists find their most resonant insights in intimate scales, while others require the physicality and complexity of the monumental?

Similar to Upritchard's embrace of personal memory and material responsiveness, Ward Knox's practice is discursively situated in tacit and embodied knowledge. Both artists work across varied materials and scales, allowing intuition and physical engagement to guide their processes. In Ward Knox's case, this manifests through his meticulous handling of materials that are imbued with a sensorial treatment. His forms often reference the natural and the corporeal - a duck, a spiderweb, a human hand or foot - each rendered with a reverence for the medium through which it emerges. The physical effort required to coax forms from resistant materials (such as timber, bone, or gold) speaks to a kind of embodied labour that accumulates through repetition. This labour often registers with the viewer when encountering a work marked by extended effort or technical skill. While practices like

³²² Polanyi. *The Tacit Dimension*, 4.

³²³ Hald. "Artist Francis Upritchard: I Can't Help the Whole World Heal."

Newby's and Upritchard's favour gestural immediacy, Armanious and Ward Knox make the presence of labour more overt within the formation of their works.

In his 2016 Frances Hodgkins Fellowship exhibition *a deep and tumbling kind of laughter*, his embodied understanding culminates in a series of minuscule oil paintings depicting intimate details of the female nude (fig.245). While these might be initially read as traditional painting, they are in fact assemblages - delicate syntheses of painting and sculpture - framed in hand-carved timber supports that are sculptural objects in their own right. These frames are honed from warm, natural wood. They curve, taper, and breathe, with lip-like edges and rounded corners that echo the softness of the flesh they surround.



Figure 245. John Ward Knox, *No Title*, 2016. Oil on board with hand carved timber frame, dimensions unknown.

The sensuous attention to the materiality of the frame converses with the subtle realism of the painted fragments. The coolness of the painted surface is offset by the warmth and tactility of the carved wood. This contrast generates a certain haptic dissonance that evokes a bodily response. In this way, Ward Knox engages an embodied knowledge of

making, revealing a deep awareness of how materials may invite touch or imply vulnerability. The modest scale of the works draws the viewer into an intimate proximity, necessitating a closeness of both body and attention. The physical scale becomes a compositional strategy to heighten sensitivity. This series offers a meditation on sensation and embodiment for artist and viewer alike. Ward Knox's sculptural language emerges through the body, thinking through the act of making itself.

In contrast to Ward Knox's haptic sensibilities, Armanious approaches his practice through tacit awareness, selecting cast objects intuitively rather than deliberately, often drawn to discarded or overlooked materials that enter his peripheral attention. He says, "I hope to get lucky with the things that blow into my sphere... you can't force it, so it's just being present and patient and letting things evolve before your eyes... it's about adjusting your perspective and then anything really happening."³²⁴ The casting process - while demanding technical precision and mastery - is only one facet of Armanious's practice. Equally significant is his tacit mode of object selection, which embraces chance or random encounters with objects. "Tacit awareness relies more on physical sensations and what I call 'unresolved sentiments' than on any specific intellectual work,"³²⁵ he explains. This approach reflects how he perceives the world and encourages viewers to recalibrate their own perceptual attention. His studio process is "often carried out intuitively and wordlessly."³²⁶ He fosters a mindset that relinquishes any sense of mastery, adding that it is necessary to "remain alert to what is already there. This demands a certain intent rather than a conscious effort."³²⁷

In his *Moths* series (figs 81, 246-250), Armanious reflects on the tension between control and surrender, allowing the material to lead. He describes the tacit process to realising

³²⁴ Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.

³²⁵ Armanious. "From Nothing", 10.

³²⁶ Armanious. "From Nothing", 46.

³²⁷ Armanious, Hany. "From Nothing", 30-31.

the composite forms: “Such exploits were always unpredictable and would come about from a series of small clues that I would watch and follow, as if on a safari, over a period of minutes or sometimes weeks, to arrive at a thing - often a moth - that I had not anticipated.”

³²⁸ Following intuition and curiosity to create each form, he arrived at the series which “came together to convey a coherent living form, with a convincing impression of vital life.”³²⁹



Figure 246. Hany Armanious, 2021. Exhibition view, Fine Arts, Sydney.

³²⁸ Armanious. “From Nothing”, 35-36

³²⁹ Armanious. “From Nothing”, 35-36



Figure 247. Hany Armanious, *Moth*, 2020. Pigmented polyurethane resin, wire, gouache, 40 x 37 x 4.5cm.

Exhibited in 2021, Armanious's *Moths* present various incarnations of dry, winged and spliced forms - some with antennae-like features, others discreetly installed in high corners where a moth might rest. The works are constructed from repurposed materials such as burnt timber, torn cardboard, table-tennis paddles, and even broken baguettes. Through these weathered and tactile objects, Armanious evokes the quiet, familiar presence of moths. Tapping into the viewer's embodied memory to bridge perception and form, the sculptures carry a subtle, ambient stillness, conjuring recognition without alarm. The titles serve as a rare instance of Armanious guiding the viewers perception of the object. One work - appearing as a porous concrete cast of a violin - might not conventionally evoke an ancient, delicate insect. Yet through the title, the artist invites the viewer to recognise form with the same openness and attentiveness that guides his own practice.



Figure 248. Hany Armanious, 2021. Exhibition view, Fine Arts, Sydney.



Figure 249. Hany Armanious, *Moth*, 2021. Pigmented polyurethane resin, 38 x 42 x 6.5cm.



Figure 250. Hany Armanious, *Moth*, 2021. Pigmented polyurethane resin, 5.5 x 78 x 51cm.

Polanyi's articulation of tacit knowledge offers a fitting lens for understanding Armanious's practice. Rather than approaching material selection analytically, he is "happy to leave [sentiments] unresolved; but they still have this emotional pull."³³⁰ These pre-cognitive impulses guide his interaction with material, acting as silent drivers that reveal themselves through sustained engagement. "It's quiet, it's peripheral, it's hardly there, but it's there and the quieter it is, the stronger it can be,"³³¹ he shares. His process is not didactic but responsive. Armanious believes the early stages require "no specific aim other than to stay open to the regular stuff around me."³³² He reflects, "Philosophy thinks with concepts, and art thinks with seeing. The word 'see' not only denotes vision but also understanding."³³³ Tacit

³³⁰ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

³³¹ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

³³² Armanious. "From Nothing", 17.

³³³ Armanious. "From Nothing", 17.

awareness is both perceptual and epistemological for Armanious - a form of attention beyond the visual that precedes naming, categorising, or interpretation.

Armanious's tacit sensibility extends into his resin casting process, where he prioritises surface fidelity and material specificity. "During the casting processes in my own work... I never cease to marvel at the sheer magic of the arrival of an object out of nothing. With every cast, I am astounded by the simple and profound manifestation of articulated reality from void."³³⁴ His work *Voiding* (fig.204) could be seen as an articulation of the profound illumination discovered within each void encountered throughout his process. Resin must be coloured before pouring, allowing for a direct transfer of detail. Armanious matches the colour in advance, then rubs "gouache or [a] dirty rag over it to highlight the texture in the surface, that sort of patinates it."³³⁵ There is a direct transference of surface, including blemishes and mildew that transfer from the original to the silicone mould and into the cast, making the process "more like printmaking."³³⁶ Armanious's casting is a double act of mimesis and perception, one that flattens the boundary between original and replica. He describes this perceptual mode as a pursuit of experience beyond theory, activated by the body before intellect intervenes. This points to a tacit dimension within both his practice and the viewer's engagement, where intuition and perception operate in tandem.

The inquiry now moves from tacit and embodied knowledge toward a distinct yet related epistemological mode: knowledge-building. Both Carmody and Langdon-Pole articulate a desire to investigate, acquire, and reframe knowledge through their processes of making. For Carmody, this manifests in a rigorous, research-led practice that seeks to expand the scope of artmaking by engaging with disciplines beyond the traditional boundaries of art.

³³⁴ Armanious. "From Nothing", 39.

³³⁵ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

³³⁶ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

Carmody remarks that his “artistic practice serves as a useful alibi to reach out to people across disciplines and technical capabilities to share stories and complete projects.”³³⁷ This spirit of enquiry drives his ongoing experimentation with new technologies and collaborative methods, enabling works that are materially ambitious and conceptually rich. When I first spoke with Carmody for this research, he had just returned from two months in the United States, including a month spent at MIT’s summer school learning about 3D printing and CNC techniques. While he acknowledges that he uses these tools “somewhat atypically for an arts context,”³³⁸ it is precisely this divergence from their intended use that interests him. He is particularly drawn to the conjectural potential of nano 3D printing - noting its application in medicine as well as in modelling astronomical phenomena - that collapse vast structures into scalable, tactile forms. Yet Carmody remains ambivalent about the seductions of technology. “Conceptually, I find 3D printing quite dangerous and difficult. But it allows things to become possible.”³³⁹ His attraction lies not in replication for replication’s sake, but in the ability to generate new modes of encounter through unfamiliar combinations of scale and material.

Carmody’s knowledge-building processes are also socially embedded, evident in an expansive and unconventional list of project contributors. His process of enquiry draws on “meticulous research, cold calling, persistence and frequent rejection. Creating an ever-expanding list of Project Partners and friends including Psychics, DNA scientists, Neuroscientists, Day-Time Television Sales Specialists, Media Managers, Border Force Agents, Computational Designers, Patent Lawyers, Cartoonists, Graphic Designers, Architects, Automotive painters...”³⁴⁰ This open-ended, interdisciplinary approach speaks to

³³⁷ “Francis Carmody.” 2025.

³³⁸ Carmody. By Alana Wilson.

³³⁹ Carmody. By Alana Wilson.

³⁴⁰ “Francis Carmody.” 2025.

an art practice that foregrounds systems of exchange. Carmody is candid about the pleasures and complications of this mode of working, saying “I quite like [working] with people who aren’t in the arts...because I learn a lot.”³⁴¹ He adds, “I suppose somewhat selfishly, I really enjoy the process of outreach and engaging with quite specific crafts and skills and applying them in an often-one-off context. Like working with a blacksmith to make an iron ring to suspend a rock. Or [working] with a rope splicer to join like a couple of different thicknesses of rope.”³⁴²

³⁴¹ Carmody. By Alana Wilson.

³⁴² Carmody. By Alana Wilson.



Figure 251. Francis Carmody, (work in progress), 2023.

This complex network of material problem-solving and social negotiation reveals Carmody's commitment to process as a mode of enquiry. He is aware that what is learned in

the making of exhibitions - the logistics, structures, and institutional ecosystems - does not always correspond with the act of making the work itself. “I have a lot of experiences that are learning through just the structure of exhibition making visually, but also the exhibition network and how institutional spaces and commercial spaces are separated, and how that kind of network operates. And none of that is actually really relevant to making work visually.”³⁴³ This tension between concept and construction drives Carmody’s work, dissolving the distinction between research and making. His practice embraces cross-disciplinary inquiry, where questions are shaped through material and conversation alike, and where learning remains inseparable from making.

Across the practices examined in this chapter, material operates as an active agent in the generation of meaning. Artists engage with both traditional mediums and everyday objects (artistic, readymade, industrial or ephemeral) as sites of knowledge, transformation, and vitality. Each medium carries with it a constellation of cultural, ecological, and perceptual associations. From the tactility of ceramics and the weight of bronze to the transience of waste materials and the coded epistemologies of found objects, these practices destabilise disciplinary boundaries and underscore the necessity of materiality and physical presence in the co-constitution of meaning with the artist. Processes of casting, preserving, recycling, walking, arranging, and site-responsiveness reflect a broader shift towards processual, relational, and embodied approaches to making. While some artists (such as Newby and Upritchard) privilege gesture and immediacy, others (such as Armanious, Ward Knox, Langdon-Pole and Carmody) declare labour and durational commitment, producing works that oscillate between intuition and rigour. These temporal and material strategies draw from legacies of Arte Povera, Fluxus, and phenomenology, while also reflecting contemporary concerns around material ethics and the agency of matter. The material and

³⁴³ Carmody. By Alana Wilson.

processual choices in these practices illuminate not only how artworks are formed, but how each artist thinks. Material becomes a vessel which both holds and reveals the maker's intentions, imbuing the final work with the erudition of existing in. reality. These artists enact a kind of thinking-through-making that affirms material's capacity to encode, evoke, and destabilise - rendering sculpture as an active and deeply profound enquiry.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, the intersections of materiality, process, and conceptual inquiry have demonstrated how contemporary sculptural practice operates as a site of rigorous investigation and knowledge-building. Across the work of Armanious, Carmody, Langdon-Pole, Newby, Upritchard and Ward Knox, this research has revealed a network of concerns and methodologies that extend beyond national borders, beyond disciplinary confines, and beyond intended outcomes. The artists' work navigates contemporary worldly conditions, possibilities and failures with inquisitive attention. Initial questions proposed were: how can art contribute to the world beyond its formal or conceptual concerns? Can it serve as a tool for deeper engagement, and for reconfiguring the ways we understand and interact with the world? What is the role of the contemporary artist today? What ethical and social responsibilities do artists bear; and how might they contribute beyond, or from within, the art world? These questions have been meaningfully explored, with a range of approaches and perspectives emerging in response.

'Chapter One: National Identities' first examined how art in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand is inextricably entwined with questions of national identity - shaped by colonial legacies, shifting sociopolitical conditions and evolving global entanglements. Visual culture has long functioned as a site for reflecting, resisting, and reimagining dominant narratives, such as decolonisation, bicultural negotiation and post-national hybridity. This chapter has foregrounded several key concerns: artists (whether based locally or internationally) recalibrate notions of home and identity through international engagement, revealing national identity as a contingent and relational construct. The enduring impact of colonial histories and the assertion of Indigenous sovereignty remain central to the formation of cultural meaning. Contemporary bicultural and postcolonial practices affirm that art, in its post-nationalist mode, remains a critical site for negotiating belonging. Artists continue to

reformulate the conditions of national belonging through transnational materials and ideologies, remaining globally responsive regardless of where they are based. Artists such as Newby, Upritchard, Swallow, McIntyre and Denny continue to shape national identity and contribute to its evolving discourse, even while working from their northern hemisphere bases. They exemplify how artistic practice can both reflect and reconfigure national identity within an increasingly interconnected world. This global perspective is integral to contemporary practice, enabling the expression of ideas through a visual language that is inherently multicultural and multivalent.

In contemporary art practices across Australia and New Zealand, questions of contemporary national identity are inseparable from broader ecological, political, and ethical concerns. Artists engage with these complexities in diverse ways, reflecting on place, responsibility and global precarity through both their work and professional trajectories. While such concerns were not as central as initially anticipated, they remain present in the intentions and values of these artists, as reflected in their interview statements. Even Armanious, who questions whether art can effect change, pursues a sense of luminosity in the everyday - a pursuit that offers viewers a moment of reflective potential. Langdon-Pole, Upritchard, and Carmody interrogate inherited epistemologies and colonial narratives, yet their work remains situated within institutional frameworks. This positioning does not undermine their criticality but reflects the paradox that for art to remain free, open and generative, it must often exist within the very structures it may seek to critique. Outside these contexts, art risks being perceived as didactic, activist or propagandistic. Even Tiravanija's *Pad Thai* (fig.106) was situated within the gallery context, where its porosity and gesture were preserved - framing the work as art and distinguishing it from an ordinary shared meal. The selected practices draw strength from international engagement, amplifying communal effort and cultivating a sense of shared inquiry across global contexts. What unites

them is a shared engagement with centre-periphery dynamics. Positioned at a geographical and cultural distance from the dominant art centres of the global north, artists in Australia and New Zealand often contend with perceptions of marginality - yet many harness this peripheral position as a critical vantage point.

‘Chapter Two: Approaches and Methodologies’ explored the conceptual frameworks and methodologies underpinning the practices of the selected artists. Through theories of relational thinking, interpolation, and creolisation, the chapter foregrounded an approach to art that privileges multiplicity and the right to opacity. Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* provided a foundational lens through which these ideas were examined, while Deleuze and Guattari’s distinction between root and rhizome offered a generative model for understanding the non-linear, expansive structures present throughout the thesis. A rhizomatic mode of engagement resists hierarchical systems of knowledge and fixed interpretations, inviting both artists and viewers to generate meaning through their own perceptual and affective responses. Similarly, interpolation operates as a methodology that privileges the interstice - the space between material, context and perception - as a site for subjective meaning-making. This conceptual openness aligns with the tethered perceptual relationship between thing and image, a dynamic that extends beyond the selected case studies and is central to the experiential and interpretive potency of contemporary art. As Armanious demonstrates, the space between object and representation is not a void but a charged field of possibility. The methodologies examined in this chapter allow artistic practices to remain adaptive, porous and responsive to their conditions. The selected artists gesture toward a post-materialist ethos, positioning art as a field of inquiry that extends beyond formal boundaries into broader cultural, political, and philosophical terrain.

‘Chapter Three: Site and Assemblage’ examined the spatial, perceptual and corporeal dynamics at play in contemporary sculptural and installation practices. The artists discussed

use space as a generative field of encounter. Assemblage, functioning both as a material strategy and a conceptual framework, enables a layered articulation of object relations and historical entanglements. Within the examined practices, assemblage operates as a relational logic that foregrounds material agency and spatial responsiveness, often disrupting categorical distinctions between the functional and the symbolic, or the ephemeral and the enduring. While many of these works still circulate within institutional and commercial contexts, they often interrogate the very systems that contain them. Assemblage becomes a mode through which artists such as Upritchard, Langdon-Pole and Armanious explore the commodification and objectification of art, prompting viewers to question the underlying economic and cultural structures that shape how artworks are perceived and valued. Resistant tensions are particularly pronounced in the practices of Newby and Ward Knox. Their installations - whether sprawling, minimal or site-responsive - resist fixity. Although they seem to escape the connotations of art-object commodification, their temporal and material ephemerality raises further ethical questions: what is the environmental cost of temporary large-scale work, and does its affective impact justify its production? These questions remain open, as they should. Not all art needs to express an answer. As Newby asks herself, “What could I be exploring here? Why do I need an exhibition to do it?”³⁴⁴ Such introspections point to a more thoughtful and sustainable practice - one that aligns with Glissant’s notion of opacity, which defends the value of ambiguity and non-disclosure as generative forces in cultural production. Irwin’s writing on viewer conditioning further illuminates this dynamic, reminding us that interpretation is always shaped by prior knowledge and embodied experience. In this light, the viewer also possesses a right to opacity: the right to perceive on their own terms, to read the work through personal value systems rather than institutional frames.

³⁴⁴ Weinberg, “Beyond Site: An Interview with Kate Newby.”

This is a sentiment I have come to reflect upon in my own position as researcher. This thesis has unfolded through an autoethnographic lens, one shaped by my artistic practice and my own attempts to find clarity or resonance in the work of others. In many ways, this project has resisted total resolution - not out of indecision, but as a deliberate embrace of art's expansive and uncontainable potential. As with the works examined, some questions remain unanswered, and perhaps that is precisely where their potency lies.

'Chapter Four: Material and Processes' examined the agency of material and the primacy of process. Armanious, Newby and Ward Knox exemplify how process can be both intuitive and rigorous, a space of embodied knowledge and intellectual inquiry. Whether through the molten preservation of bronze, the chance-ridden process of ceramics, or the temporality and associative factors of readymade objects, all the artists engage material as an active collaborator. They challenge conventional hierarchies between high and low, functional and symbolic, permanent and transient. Their processes - be they gestural (Newby), durational (Ward Knox, Armanious), or speculative (Upritchard, Carmody, Langdon-Pole) - function as epistemologies in themselves. Meaning does not precede the work but is discovered through it.

These artists appear to pursue a more equitable distribution of knowledge and cultural influence. Langdon-Pole and Upritchard foster critical engagement with inherited histories and epistemologies. Carmody participates in this discourse more subtly, weaving layered narratives that evoke similar concerns. Newby and Ward Knox, by contrast, orient their practices toward the everyday, using ephemeral or craft-based materials to reconnect art with embodied knowledge and shared human experience. Armanious, though less overt in articulating such values, creates open interpretive spaces that invite heightened attentiveness

and the “incredible luminosity”³⁴⁵ he describes - encouraging perceptual openness rather than didactic resolution.

Meaning in the practices of these artists emerges through material, process, and perception. Each artist engages meaning as contingent and relational, formed in the act of making and extended through the viewer’s encounter. Meaning for Upritchard arrives retrospectively, after the spontaneity of the sculptural process has subsided. Her approach privileges intuition, allowing the work to reveal its true character after its making. Meaning for Newby arises through sustained engagement with environment. As she reflects, her goal is to get out onto the land at her ranch in Texas and see how to mould her practice to prioritise the work, over an exhibition. Her installations examined in this research reflect this desire to prioritise spatial intimacy and personal attention over institutional framing. Ward Knox sees his role as artist through the lens of shared recognition; he expresses, “I am the first viewer. I make it for myself, with the hope that I am human enough that there will be others like me out there who will see what I do in the work. It is an act of faith. And if they do not see what I see, I hope that the stories the material holds will be fruitful enough for the viewer to take their own path to meaning.”³⁴⁶ His process is a path rather than a resolution. Armanious’s process derives meaning from revealing the perceptual and philosophical weight of objects. “To actively surrender one’s full attention, as a maker or a spectator, does help us to awaken slightly to the vastness around us,”³⁴⁷ he shares. This awakening appears to be what feeds his practice. His sculptures often begin as discarded or overlooked objects; as he states, “the materials are valueless. They’re bad materials and they shouldn’t be there at all. But it’s this act of reproducing it and bringing [awareness to] it. So the question is, is it making it any better by making it again? That’s always a question people say - why? [Why

³⁴⁵ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

³⁴⁶ Ward Knox. By Alana Wilson.

³⁴⁷ Armanious. “From Nothing”, 47.

not] just use the real thing; why this whole process? And the answer is yes, it actually does add value. It transcends the object.”³⁴⁸ For Armanious, replication is intensification rather than depletion. Viewers may say it “depletes the aura. I think the opposite, that it actually adds aura.”³⁴⁹ The aura Armanious describes transpires through both bodily process and relational or intellectual engagement. It unfolds between sensation and understanding, sustained by ongoing interaction from artist and viewer alike, and remains interpretively expansive. This ethos underscores a shared belief that meaning is not imposed but discovered - through making, attention, and experience. It arises first in the artist’s encounter with material and process, and only then opens outward to the viewer. Art, in this sense, must first matter to the artist, where meaning emerges as a generative force.

Across all practices, and on various levels, process serves as the primary catalyst and muse. Armanious’s casting becomes a philosophical pursuit where the profound potential of the void can be illuminated; for Langdon-Pole and Carmody, exhibition-making is a space for sustained knowledge-building. Newby, by contrast, privileges embodied responsiveness over mastery, embracing immediacy and tactility in ways that challenge conventional trajectories of artistic refinement. Ward Knox’s commitment lies in craftsmanship, material sensitivity, and the rhythm of his daily practice, while Upritchard’s work is shaped by cross-cultural exchange and collaborative formation.

Across these varied approaches - material, process, interpolation - the artists articulate meaning not through mastery alone, but through engagement: with their tools, contexts and philosophical positions. It is an approach that is innately rhizomatic - in the way works are made, exhibitions are formed, conceptual threads are drawn, and material integrity is sustained. These practices interpolate fragments, materials and references to point to a larger

³⁴⁸ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

³⁴⁹ Armanious. By Alana Wilson.

whole. But there is no singular root - only connection, circulation and multiplicity. This echoes Rosalind Krauss's observation that contemporary artists collect from the world around them, rather than picture it.³⁵⁰ The artists in this research don't reimagine utopias or propose new worlds - they hold a mirror to the one we inhabit. They calibrate conversations rather than dictate messages. These are conversations that transpire with one another, within oneself, or perhaps even only within one's subconscious. The world their work refers to is the one we already occupy: a world of objects and people, newsfeeds and noise, facts and fictions, values and failures - systems that structure, support and betray us. These forces - whether addressed directly or indirectly - seep through the surfaces of their work. I acknowledge this may be tainted with my own personal perceptions.

Artists now are using the world around them - the matter and the thinking, the systems and the behaviours - to illuminate what is already innately known. Their role is not to dream up escape but to make visible what one might otherwise overlook. These artists all illuminate a knowledge that the viewer already possesses. They affirm that the answer is right in front of us, or beneath our feet, or found in moments of looking back at history, culture and the temporality of humanity. Their work reminds us that knowledge and truth can be found in corporeality and curiosity, in the innately human traits we already possess; we not only have the answers right in front of us, but we have the tools to find the answers too. The act of noticing becomes the work.

In closing, this thesis affirms that the most compelling sculptural practices today are those that honour complexity. They dwell in the interstices between thinking and making, between form and formlessness, between the world we inherit and the one we might still reconfigure. Art, at its most vital, helps us to notice - to attend to what we already know but

³⁵⁰ Rosalind E. Krauss. *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2000.

have forgotten how to see. And in that act of renewed seeing, it might offer not answers, but a means of continuing to ask.

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Appendix

Artist Interview conversation topics and relative questions

(as approved by University of Sydney Human Ethics Committee, 2024)

1. Overall recurring ideas in work and practice

- 1.1 Why do you make art? (Reveals what the artist needs from their practice)
- 1.2 Why did you start out making art and why do you make art now?
- 1.3 Do you consider yourself to “make art”, or is it just what you do?
- 1.4 Do you separate art and life?
- 1.5 In your own words, could you expand on what thoughts are currently driving new work for you?
- 1.6 Do these considerations or concepts consistently occur in your work and practice?
- 1.7 What do you feel would be the overarching, recurring questions, themes, or ideas that you explore through your practice?
- 1.8 Do you feel you express these ideas explicitly or ambiguously? Why do you feel the need to express them in this way?

2. Consideration of broader issues, or the external world.

- 2.1 Do you have concerns about current world issues? (could be local, regional, national, global, short-term, long-term) If so, what are they?
- 2.2 Beyond your work as an artist - let's say you as a citizen, as a human - do you feel any responsibility towards these issues? Does this feeling permeate into your practice or work? If so, how?
- 2.3 Do you attempt to communicate or express thoughts about greater social, ethical, environmental, political issues in an ambiguous way? If so, do you feel a need to be ambiguous about it? Why?
- 2.4 What kind of existential problems do you investigate/deal with/communicate about in your work? Do these affect only you or your community, your family, your friends, greater nation or world?
- 2.5 Do you ever consider your works social, environmental, ethical, or political impact? Do these concerns ever outweigh aesthetic considerations? (Even if it is a grey area, or subtle ways of engaging with issues that are non-artistic or in a non-artistic context; or it may be in and within an artistic context.)

3. Antagonism and critical thinking in their practice

- 3.1 Are you critical of art? To what degree?
- 3.2 Do you consider your work or practice oppositional in any way? What does it oppose?
- 3.3 Other than these immediate issues, do you question the external world in your practice or work? If so, what do you question?
- 3.4 Do you take an antagonistic view of things - of your practice, or of the greater world?
- 3.5 Do you believe (your art / all art) needs to sustain a kind of antagonism? A kind of questioning?

- 3.6 What do you interrogate in your work and/or practice? How do you navigate this?
- 3.7 Do you have aims or outcomes you hope your work or practice will lead to? (Such as fine-tuning or far-reaching social change)
- 3.8 Can you elaborate on the kind of dialogues, encounters, proposals or formations you intend your work or practice to lead to?

4. Conversation topic: Representation of ideas through work

- 4.1 Do you feel a sense of responsibility as an artist to address global issues? Why or why not?
- 4.2 Do you feel it's an artist's role to offer alternative ways of living and thinking?
- 4.3 Do you feel you represent utopias or realities within your work? Do you differentiate between the two? - Do you feel optimistic or pessimistic in your practice, towards the world?

5. Conversation topic: Philosophical questioning

- 5.1 Are artists just re-calibrating the world after what everyone else does to it? (Politics, commerce, ethics, etc.)
- 5.2 Due to Australia and New Zealand having a strong connection to the notion of landscape as culture, or landscape as identity - What are your thoughts on the idea that people that have grown up intertwined with landscape have greater awareness, connection, reverence to the land and its processes, and preserving it?

6. Conversation topic: Material and Process

- 6.1 What kind of materials do you use in your practice, and is there a reasoning behind them?
- 6.2 What are your thoughts on the language of the material, scale, and form you use in your work?
- 6.3 Do you feel certain materials, mediums, or processes have imbued meaning or value?
- 6.4 Do you feel there are any material, cultural, ethical, or ecological implications connected to the materials you use? What are they?
- 6.5 Can you elaborate on your choice of medium/s - what are your considerations regarding aesthetic quality and beyond aesthetic quality?
- 6.6 In Relational Aesthetics (a term created by curator Nicolas Bourriaud in the 1990s to describe the tendency to make art based on, or inspired by, human relations and their social context), "contact and tactility" are privileged... do you feel this could explain the resurgence / interest in tactile forms in art?
- 6.7 Do you consider the implications or result of making work in this way? (I.e. toxic / nontoxic; re-use or recycle; ephemeral or finite material; material as resource; implications of certain artistic processes.)
- 6.8 Do you consider resourcefulness or sustainability in your practice?
- 6.9 What are some processes or methodologies that you deploy in your practice to carry out work in a sustained and impactful way?

7. Visual Language

- 7.1 What are your thoughts on art as a visual language?
- 7.2 Do you consider there to be a kind of visual language in your work? If so, is this achieved via form, colour, scale, material, process, context, etc...?), elaborate...
- 7.3 Many cultures have a visual language that is passed on through generations, evolving with the time it exists in but still connected to the past, like a kind of DNA. Your work deals with (*post-colonialism, indigenous knowledge, etc). Can you elaborate on the kind of cultural visual language/s you are alluding to/connecting with in your work?
- 7.4 Can you elaborate on your experience of exhibiting and sharing work internationally (and cross-culturally)? How was your work perceived or understood? Or misunderstood?
- 7.5 If you were to trace the roots of your own visual language, where do you think it would stem from? (E.g. inherited visual systems from upbringing, childhood experiences, personal likes, or philosophies)

8. Conscientious Practice

- 8.1 What motivates you to address certain ideas or issues in your artwork?
- 8.2 Do you believe art (in general) can be a catalyst for change on a global scale?
- 8.3 Have you seen any tangible impact or change (either in your work, or other's work) by art engaging with these greater issues?
- 8.4 How do you approach representing cultures, communities, or issues that may be outside of your personal experience?
- 8.5 In what ways do you aim to foster empathy and understanding through your art?
- 8.6 Many global issues are interconnected. How do you navigate addressing multiple issues or perspectives in your work?
- 8.7 How do you balance the complexity of global issues while making your art accessible to a broad audience?

9. Collaboration & community

- 9.1 Do you collaborate with other artists or organisations when addressing these issues? If so, how does collaboration enhance your work?
- 9.2 Do you engage with communities or individuals affected by issues or ideas that you address in your work?
- 9.3 How do you measure the impact or effectiveness of your art in raising awareness or advocating for global issues?
- 9.4 Are there specific stories or feedback from your audience that stand out to you as indicators of impact?
- 9.5 Have you ever faced backlash or criticism for your approach to addressing sensitive topics?
- 9.6 What global issues or themes do you hope to explore in your future artistic projects?
- 9.7 Are there specific goals or messages you aim to convey through your upcoming work?
- 9.8 What advice would you give to individuals who want to use art as a means of addressing greater challenges or issues through their practice?

10. Global Issues: Ecological, Social, Political, & Ethical

- 10.1 How do you derive value within your art, as an artist? (“Quality” “good” “successful” “important - historically, culturally, contextually”)
- 10.2 How did you form this value system? Does it change?
- 10.3 Do you feel once a work is deemed “good”, does it remain that way, in history or in culture? And what about in your practice?
- 10.4 Do you believe the context of ideas matters to an artwork being deemed valuable or “good”?
- 10.5 Do you have the same value system towards viewing art? (You as viewer)
- 10.6 Do you ethically critique art? What considerations do you think about?

- 10.7 Do you feel a work needs to be understood? Understood prior to placing or assessing its value? (This could be aesthetic value, cultural value, contextual value, etc.)
- 10.8 What are your thoughts on the context that your work exists in, such a gallery space, museum show, non- gallery context, indoors/outdoors, public programmes, film, reproduction etc?
- 10.9 Are there any limitations or benefits to how your work is encountered or presented? –
- 10.10 When you are making work, do you think about the space and time it will exist in? Elaborate on your considerations.
- 10.11 How do you feel about the exhibition context and the time-space frame it places on your work?
- 10.12 Have you come across any alternative models of sharing or presenting work that you are drawn to?
- 10.13 Do you keep previous works as an archive or reference? Do you look back on previous works?
- 10.14 What are your views on the ecosystem that is the “art world” - the art market, institutions, artists?

11. Is there anything you wish to add or discuss further that we have not covered in our conversation so far? - Would you be willing to answer further questions in a follow-up conversation?