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At Dusk Nothing Is Hidden

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An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts at Massey University, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Aotearoa, 2024.

We stand in relation to all elements of the universe, just as we do with future and past. It is the direction and endurance of our attention that determines which should become important and effective for us.

(Novalis qtd. in Mika, *Reclaiming Mystery* 50)



Fig. 1. *Untitled 9*, personal photograph by author, repurposed newsprint and black wrap foil, Engine Room Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Aotearoa, 2024.

Abstract

My practice as an artist is at the intersection between sculpture, installation and photography. Here, I explore the interdependence of light and dark through the use of ephemeral materials while responding artistically to the spaces they occupy. I explore themes of transience, latency and potential, specifically how the perception of light and space relates to notions of visibility, darkness and the unknown.

Introduction

Creative practice invites continuous movement between subjective and subconscious states of being and contemplation, and wider political and cultural modes of thinking and acting. As an artist, I move between these two states absorbing and questioning my political and cultural environment and my place within it through my work.

I seek to explore two questions in relation to my artwork and the processes and context of its making. First, how my small creative actions reveal a positionality, an orientation in the world. Second, how the artwork becomes an interface through which the interplay of materials, forms and space speak to this positionality.

My practice is embedded in process; an enaction of thinking through doing realised through my active engagement with materials in space. My making process is speculative, a form of knowledge-seeking and a way of actively engaging with the philosophical and intangible elements of events in my life.

The following text documents the rebuilding of an artmaking practice. I describe some of the ways my experiences working in the film industry over the last twenty years have shaped my current practice.

Working at the perimeter of my knowing self is a feeling I carry as I engage in creative work, which unfolds and changes as I do. I am aware that I am being affected by and changed by the creative process as I move through it, simultaneously becoming cognisant of the frameworks I exist within as I question or seek to undo them through my work. This is a point of significance to me, encompassed by Māori Marsden and his description of the world in its ongoing “process of becoming”. (Marsden and Royal)

Throughout my study, Carl Mika, a Māori philosopher educated in Western philosophical theory, has been a seminal figure in my research. In his writing, he addresses subjects such as the colonial constructs of metaphorical framing of light and dark, and notions of energy or ‘persistence’ of life force within things as pertaining to an indigenous perspective. Additionally, he writes about the importance of the role of mystery and uncertainty in the speculative activity of thinking, within the context of Western knowledge systems. As I progress deeper into my work these key themes have become important anchors.

I wish to acknowledge the Māori leaders and academics referred to in my research and recognise the responsibility inherent in referencing world views that are not from my own culture. Their scholarship has allowed me to identify alignments with my own ideologies and their relativity to my art practice. I don’t wish to subsume these views as my own but to understand their importance in terms of the well-being of our future and my context here in Aotearoa.

Before commencing this study in 2023, I spent 20 years working as a costume textile artist in the film industry.

In 2019, my role supervising a large textile department on a billion-dollar production in Auckland required that I live away from my home in Wellington. This time was formative, my mother became terminally ill in the middle of 2019 and was given six months to live. Her diagnosis coincided with the Australian bushfires that had been raging through Victoria over the past few months, including Gippsland, where she had grown up and now lived in my grandparent’s house on the shores of a saltwater lake.

During that period, my visits to see her became increasingly shrouded with acrid smelling air, and a strange yellow poisonous quality to the light, surreal and disturbing. It echoed my emotional state. At its worst, I could see the flames across the lake from her house, a line of fire along the top of the hills. It was her wish to die at home. There was talk of what would be done if the fires got too close.

On the 9th of January 2020, she passed away. After a time, I returned to work in Aotearoa; the skies glowed pink from across the ocean as if I’d carried them home with me. The COVID pandemic was declared on March 23rd 2020, and the level four lockdown was implemented. This was less than two months after my mother died. She was spared any knowledge of its enormous impact.

This timeline of personal grief, environmental disaster and the fallout from a global pandemic was the climate within which I decided to return to art making. It was a decision that asked me to unpack my sense of self and the place I live in.

Through this forced experience of mortality, I considered my maternal lineage and ultimately, through my distress, I felt the urgency of an unavoidable sense of temporality and the fleeting moments that make up our lives.

That unpacking prompted thoughts around notions of value and purpose, and my own autonomy and agency—all within a changed environmental and socio-political landscape.

Process, the dual presence and hiddenness of an entity

I think of my process as an open-ended question, a what-if, a mode of thinking within the parameters of the materials and forms I use in my creative practice. The resulting artwork is a continuum of the process in its temporal nature. It is a 'philosophy of making' that bridges the speculative space between making and theory through iterations and a sustained material-led methodology.

My practice considers how latency and potential are linked to the concept of the unknown, specifically, how "things disclose themselves when we choose to pay attention and remain silent otherwise." (Maclean 33)

The activity of revealing the potential within a material is concerned also with its intangible nature; the non-physical reality that exists outside of human perception. I define tangible as sensory knowledge, physical, and touchable—an object's "glaringly evident" (Mika, *Thereness* 11) presence. Something intangible is obscured, imperceptible, demanding an even greater level of my attention.

Through my practice, it is becoming increasingly evident to me that to begin to comprehend or understand something is to be attentive to both its tangible and intangible nature. It is to recognise a sense of other in the presence and ongoing process of a material object, described by Mika as "the dual hiddenness and presence of an entity." (Mika qtd. in Maclean 24)

Counter-colonial thought brings back an intention to read an object in terms of what it may withhold from us, even where that withholding force is thoroughly unknowable. It is possibly the darkness behind the glaringly evident object that draws us on to continue thinking. (Mika, *Thereness* 11)

The literacy for the feeling aspects of our intelligence

My process of creating artwork is generative, centred around identifying the potential of materials and bringing that potential out in a given space. Materials are processed and arranged in different iterations of form to create relationships with the space and each other. By engaging with the latent formal and phenomenological qualities of material through repeated actions of creating, undoing, and remaking, I build an understanding that informs my ongoing practice. My process requires an investment of time with materials to consider their relationship to the shifting light conditions and potentials of the architectural location in the resolution of a work.

The sense of ‘not knowing’ and the urge to movement, hones my response to what is happening within the activity of making. In her essay, *Who Do We Think We Are?* Rebecca Sinclair proposes the mode of thinking-through-doing as a “literacy for the feeling aspects of our intelligence (which are all about movement, dynamism, energy, and life).” She says, “Thinking is not only a mental process that happens in disembodied minds. It happens through our bodies, through our connections with each other, and in collaboration with the more-than-human world”. (Sinclair, *Who Do We Think We Are?*)

Thinking as praxis is an evidence-based method of deepening and expanding knowledge. As artists, it is the ways we engage in our disciplines that amplify our knowledge, or our “literacy for the feeling aspects of our intelligence”. (Sinclair, *Who Do We Think We Are?*)

This permissive understanding of thinking privileges process over outcome. It includes my environmental, spatial, physical, and subconscious awareness. I draw on intuitive knowledge which operates as a connecting element; a knowing that sits between my internal self and my impulses and actions. As a maker, it is inherently tied to the creative process, it is how I understand myself and my relationship to the world.

Methodology - enabling the voice of the material to be heard

My methodology of 'thinking through doing' has developed as a natural progression of my empathy for the autonomy of material, experienced through prolonged practice. I sense that the learning or knowing lies not within a resolution, but within an active mind/body engagement with a material. My approach allows the idea and form to emerge at the same time, enabling the voice of the material to be heard.

Te Kawehau Hoskins and Alison Jones in their essay *Non-Human Others and Kaupapa Māori Research* consider the difficulties of applying method to an engagement with the intangible nature of matter, in how to proceed without placing yourself at the centre. They say, "Maybe the provocation is to encounter uncertainly the object world. This suggests method as an ongoing struggle and as constant attempts at connection rather than a set of rules for procedure." (Hoskins and Jones 27)

An iterative process - a sequence of actions and observations

A note in my workbook earlier this year: *My interaction with material is slow and progressive, a sequence of actions and observations. An intuition about where/what the material might reveal itself. When does it shift from an action to its resolved state, where it resonates with its environment and has transcended its original state or function?*

Pauline Rhodes's sculptural work is easily situated in current discourse around environmental politics. Her work uses the agency of material to illustrate ideas of knowledge as connection. She reuses her materials in her artworks, adapting their arrangements to relate to the scale of the space.

Her work *This Swaying Earth* (fig.2) articulates forces "working energetically against the stability of the spaces' geometry" (Barton 16) through balance, angular form, organic material and processes. As our eyes are drawn to the connection points within the work, we are made aware of these connections as both literal and metaphorical.

I recognise in her process an alignment in how I develop the material and space relationship in my practice. Both the making and engagement with the material - the gathering and reassembling - are evident in Rhodes's completed work.

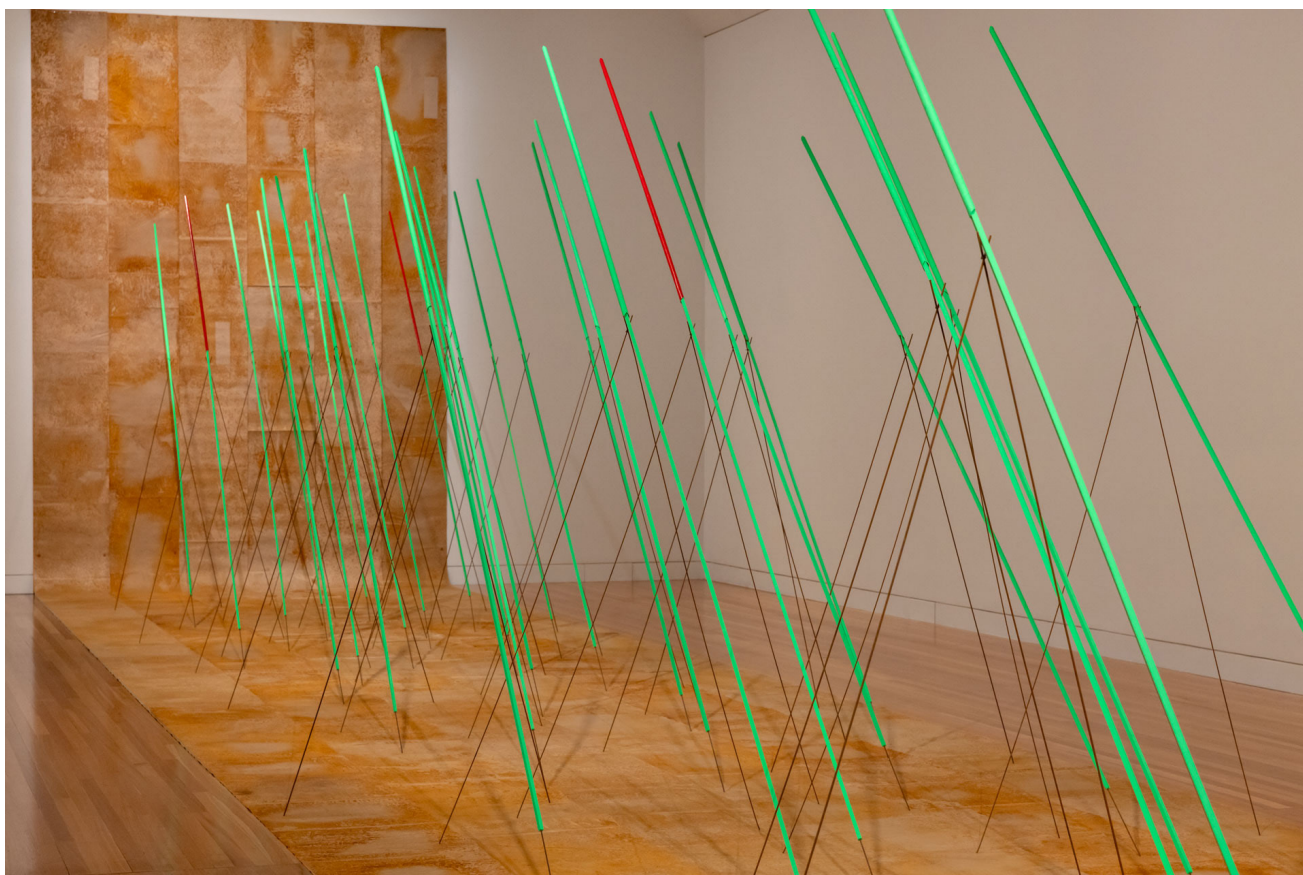


Fig. 2. Rhodes, Pauline. *This Swaying Earth, Extensum/Extensor*. 1985, shown originally at the CSA, Mair Gallery (now CoCA), Te Papa (1983-0082-1), paper, wood, steel, plastic and paint.

As Barton describes, “Her installations and placements are the outcome of a set of activities - collecting, arranging, piling, draping, tying, leaning, propping, lying, floating – performed on materials that are combined and manipulated in specific contexts...her work therefore enacts process and literalises time.” (Barton 17)

In preparation for my exhibition in the Engine Room Gallery in July this year, I developed a large number of modular forms in my studio that could be arranged in multiple possible iterations.

In the following artworks, (Fig.3-11) I brought my materials into the gallery space and made and re-made works in situ. I had experimented with some of these iterations in my studio, but once I had access to the gallery, I could respond to and integrate them into the space. There was a drawing quality to this activity where the white gallery walls became the page and the graphic line of the dark interior became the drawn line.



Fig. 3. *Untitled 1*, personal photograph by author, newsprint and black wrap foil, Engine Room Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024.



Fig. 4. *Untitled 2*, personal photograph by author, newsprint and black wrap foil, Engine Room Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024.



Fig. 5. *Untitled 3*, personal photograph by author, newsprint and black wrap foil, Engine Room Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024.



Fig. 6. *Untitled 4*, personal photograph by author, newsprint and black wrap foil, Engine Room Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024.



Fig. 7. *Untitled 5*, personal photograph by author, newsprint and black wrap foil, Engine Room Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024.



Fig. 8. *Untitled 6*, personal photograph by author, newsprint and black wrap foil, Engine Room Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024.



Fig. 9. *Untitled 7*, personal photograph by author, newsprint and black wrap foil, Engine Room Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024.

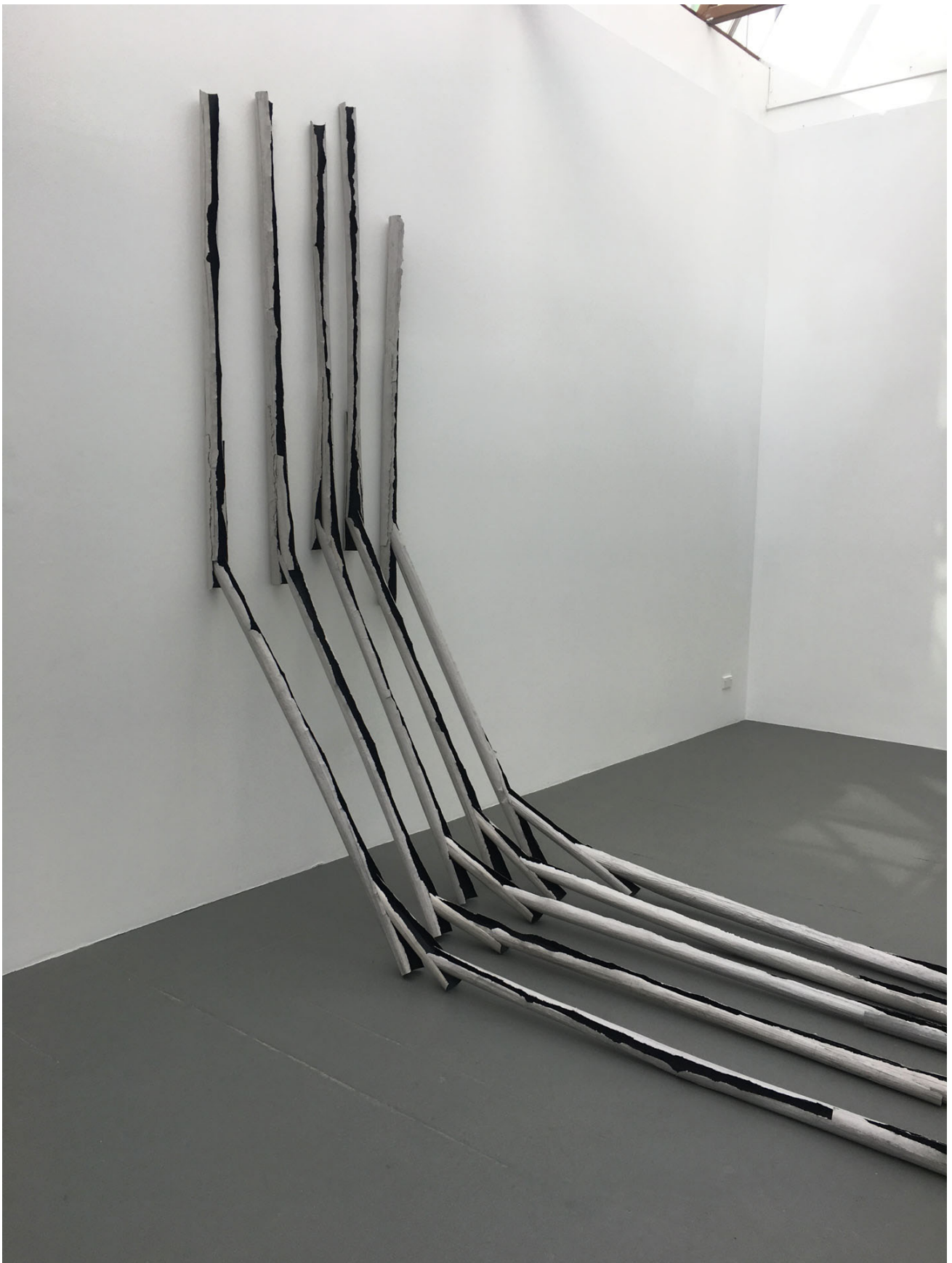


Fig. 9. *Untitled 8*, personal photograph by author, newspaper and black wrap foil, Engine Room Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024.

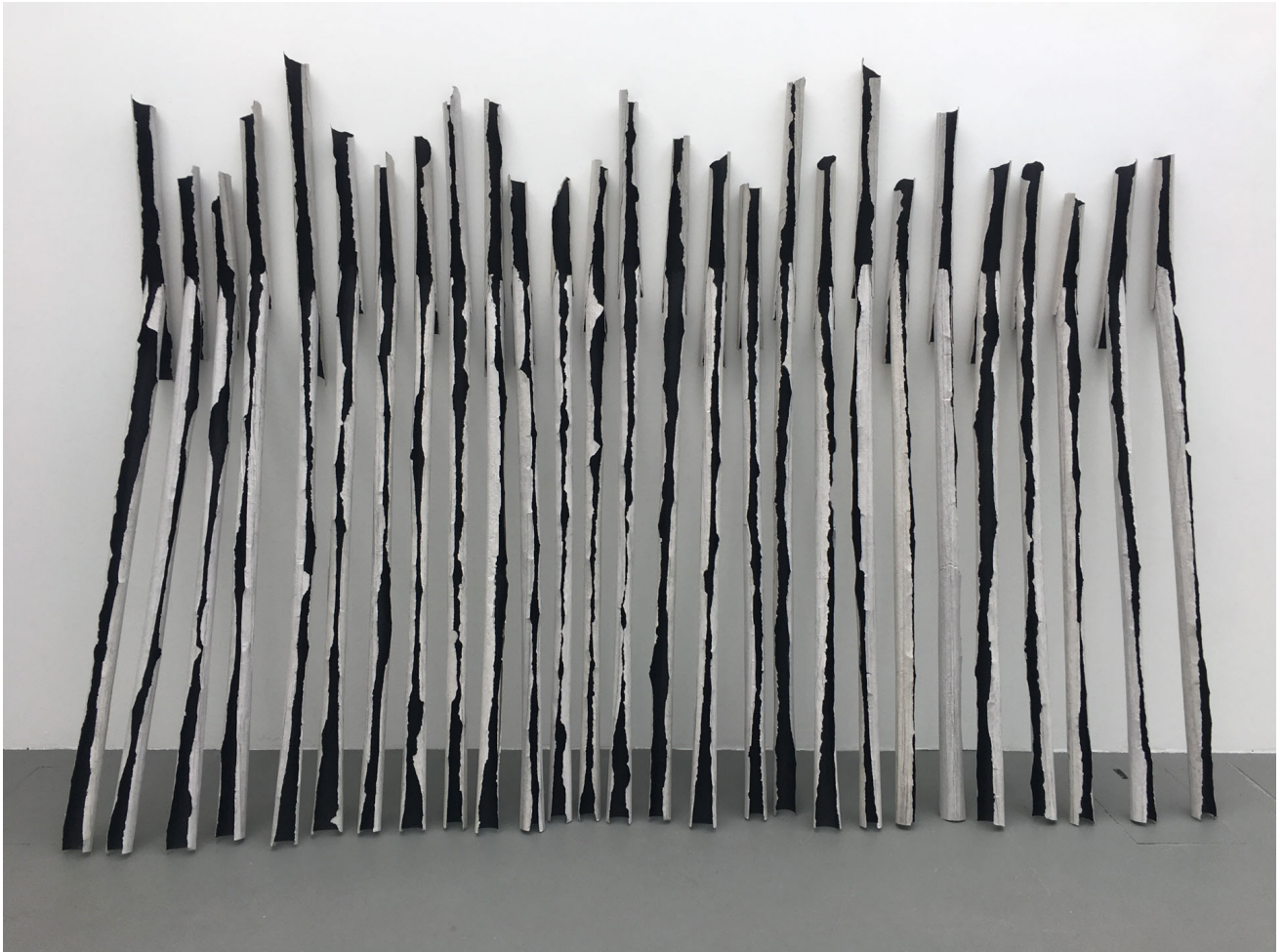


Fig. 11. *Untitled 9*, personal photograph by author, newsprint and black wrap foil, Engine Room Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024.

These trials informed the final iteration of the work, pictured above. (fig.11)

Syncopation: a disturbance or interruption of the regular flow of rhythm.

As a collective of separate vertical elements, the work (fig.11) conveyed an irregular linear rhythm, through the interior/exterior relationship of the light and dark material, echoed in the space between and behind each line.

In developing the work in the Engine Room gallery, I was struck by the way its dark interior, with its absence of light, became present and dominant. The visible black line, created through the absence of light became a spatialised graphic, a physical drawing in space as the dark interior visually moved towards the viewer, rather than retreating in shadow.

The way the work was tenuously balanced against the wall demanded space in the room as the viewer became aware of the tension within the mechanics of its arrangement. Its self-supporting form created a sense of something about to happen, that it was about to shift or move. It was not static but vibrating. The torn edges, the pull of gravity, and the movement forward and backward of the light and dark spaces created a sense of dynamic forces.

This work, in its final form, was the result of working through many iterations in the gallery space. Through these iterations, I attempted to bring the formal considerations and the aesthetic phenomena of light and space together.

This is an example of an answer lying within the properties of the material itself, and the qualities of the resulting form made possible by the material. In this case, I worked with the black foils' ability to negate light by creating an interior space. The material held a curve that created strength, which allowed me to consider it individually and collectively as a three-dimensional work that could stand on its own. The scale was determined by the limitations of the size of the rolls of foil I had. As I tore the edges of the laminated paper and foil to create an organic line, the material maintained its strength, both edges framing the deep black of the interior space.

The idea and form emerged at the same time by working with the material's limitations and potential.



Fig. 12. *Untitled 10*, detail. personal photograph by author, repurposed newsprint and black wrap foil, Engine Room Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Aotearoa, 2024.



Fig. 13. *Pale darkness*, personal photograph by author, reflective ink on drafting paper, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Aotearoa, 2023.

Hearing the shape of the work through its construction

The work shown above (fig.13) is the moment in my Master of Fine Arts study in which I began to understand how connected to and guided by the material I am. Initially, coming into this programme from my textile career, I decided to avoid fabric in the first stages of my study. I required a separation at the outset from what I considered very different disciplines. Subsequently, paper became my medium, operating both as a textile and as a sculptural material.

As I developed this work, I shaped the paper and noticed how it held its form. By honouring the line of the painted surface through how I arranged the pieces, I created a collective presence; enabling all the elements of its reflective surface to work together compositionally.

While reflecting on this work in its final form, I was struck by its autonomy; I had the sense that it had made itself through me. I was looking back at the result of the relationship between an unknown part of myself and the tangible, material form of a work in space.

It is “an uncanny feeling of being in the presence of an aspect of oneself – a non- or not-quite-human aspect that is nevertheless intrinsic to one’s flesh and blood and bones – also present in the body of another.” (Bennett, *Encounters with an Art-Thing* 81)

It was here that I understood what could determine resolution or resonance in a work, the understanding of when it has found its form.

The work above (fig.13) provoked thinking about how a material can transmit a sense of something beyond what it presents as — an intangible sense of a will or persistence as it coheres into its form. It resonated through its articulation of light and suggestion of mass through its materiality. The relativity of the work to the presence of the viewer became key experiential elements and have since become important components of my practice.

The traces of how the hand and the material have spoken are manifested in the tearing, crumpling, and manipulation. They became visible through texture and asymmetry in contrast to the machined state in which the materials are made. Matter originates from the earth and is subject to organic forces of decay, growth and change. Through my interactions with materials, the actions of making can reveal the organic form of the matter through my touch. I too am subject to and affected by elemental, organic forces that can manifest in this interaction.

When materials “become willful actors and agents within artistic processes and enmesh their audiences in a network of connections” (Lange-Berndt 17) they are enacting their autonomy. I cannot remove myself from this equation but recognise the diminished nature of the “centrality of the artist as the instigator and sole repository of meaning” in this scenario. (Barton 20)

If I am to understand my work through what it does rather than what it is, I must keep hearing the shape of the work through its construction and develop and privilege this reciprocal relationship.



Fig. 14. *Pale darkness*, personal photograph by author, reflective ink on drafting paper, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Aotearoa, 2023.

Below the threshold of reflective attention

More than just a way of considering the elusive nature of creative activity, the notion of agency has become a signifier of imperceptible forces at play within the material itself, revealed through the process of realising an artwork.

Jane Bennett, a political theorist and author of *Vibrant Matter* describes how, “once a material has surpassed its ‘use’ it is freed from judgement and as thing it paradoxically rises to a new status - that of a more active party in encounters. And we now become more sensitive to real forces that previously operated below the threshold of reflective attention.” (Bennett 79)

My creative practice is focused on noticing the ways a material can enact its autonomy as I work with it. I give much consideration to the idea that we are affected by and also affect invisible phenomena through our physical presence and actions.

In Māori Marsden’s book, *The Woven Universe*, he describes the developments of new physics in terms of quantum theory “with its idea of a real world beyond sense perception, consisting of a series of processes and complex patterns of energy” (Marsden and Royal 95) as coinciding with the Māori world view. “This world”, he says, “exists independently of us and though we cannot apprehend it by direct means, we may grasp it by speculative means” (30). I think of the ways I develop artwork as a kind of “grasping by speculative means” — my generative process revealing forces outside of my comprehension that exist alongside my physical and sensorial experiences.

Mika describes, in his paper *The Thing’s Revelation*, the active properties of entities, “In a Māori worldview, things are not just passive entities awaiting construction by the self (Mika, 2014); they are instead animate and creative, having a much greater impact on the self than would be credited in dominant rational discourse.” (Mika, *The Thing’s Revelation* 63)

The acknowledgement of autonomy within non-human entities or matter underpins Mika's cultural context, which is also shared by Bennett and reflected within animism theories. Animism is useful in considering the cultural contexts of the notion of the life force within matter. In her book, *Towards a Cosmopolitan Animism*, Kathryn Rountree describes the differences and connections between that which is Indigenous and the contemporary philosophy of New Animism. She says:

What all animisms share within the cosmopolitan contexts they now frequently inhabit, is a relational epistemology, an ecosophy or model of social relations that incorporates humans and other-than-human beings in a matrix of interdependent interconnection. For Indigenous peoples, this model is implicit, inherited and foundational to group being, seeing and doing in everyday life. For New Animists, it is an explicit, elective belief, an aspirational charter for living and an impetus for activism, motivated by a deep concern to decentre humans' position in the ecosystem. (345)

Here, matter is not inert and separate from living organisms; it is not able to be controlled, measured, or discarded as in capitalist Western thinking because it has its own autonomy. This mindset is an 'elective belief' for Pakeha because it is not a culturally embedded way of being and knowing but acts as a challenge to inherited empirical thinking.

The relationality and empathy referred to in the above quote does not presuppose a human-centric position in our encounters with the world. Objects, material, and matter can now be known and understood in terms of their relationship with everything around them, human and non-human, the unseen and the invisible. For example, Jane Bennett describes the "power of attributes that belong to the thing itself—colour, shape, texture, rhythm, temporality and materiality." And that these things have a life force which is independent of their human makers." (96)

Understanding my relationship to both the physical and non-physical qualities of matter and my relativity to them is anchored in this idea. The implications of that thinking forms the basis of my approach to making.



Fig. 15. *Pale darkness*, detail. personal photograph by author, reflective ink on drafting paper, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Aotearoa, 2023.

Agency of material

Agency is the experience of being inside the activity of making. Any maker understands this idea — the sense that when you touch, move or form a material it pushes back and informs your movements through its active, physical presence. It becomes an extension of yourself where the separation between you the maker and it the material defies an active/passive binary.

In *Playing with Clay and the Uncertainty of Agency*, Paul Louis March relates this idea to his making. “The experience of sculpting is a disturbing one because the boundaries of the world and myself become transient, unstable and incomplete”. (149)

Colonial inheritance is that we think we have voice or mastery as artists. This idea is echoed in Barton’s comment that material is the “author of its own effects.” (Barton 18), negating the implied hierarchy within that inheritance.

March describes his creative interactions with clay through the idea of ‘the middle voice’. He refers to Benveniste who says: “In the middle voice, the doer remains inside the process of his doing; he achieves something, which is being achieved in him.” (Benveniste qtd. in March 138)

As I work with the physical, tactile nature of a material alongside its ‘poetic’, non-corporeal qualities, I develop an ongoing reciprocal relationship between myself and the material. The materials are equally making themselves known through my actions, their genealogy and social and political origins becoming part of the complex web of meaning embodied within their physical properties.

Throughout my study, I have also had recourse to consider the notion of agency within myself as I get deeper into my practice. I am determining my own potential through these materials. Further, I consider through my work the positionality and implications of a political and philosophical mode of engagement that privileges process and lets the materials speak. If I am to recognise a material or space’s authorship, then by default I must also recognise the active quality of its voice, and understand the ‘unstable boundaries’ between myself and my materials.

Material

Opacity.

Translucency.

A memory or tendency in the structure and form of a material.

Ability to illuminate reflect or absorb light.

A tonality of greys or whites or blacks.

An organic sensibility even if the material is synthetic.

An ability to simultaneously activate two seemingly opposing states at once such as obscurity and illumination.

Ephemerality.

These are attributes I am drawn to in the materials I use in my artwork. I often notice particular qualities that become evident in a material in terms of its relationship to other things; the scale of the space it will occupy, its relationship to light, its fluidity/solidity and its potential to be brought into three-dimensional space. When choosing or engaging with a material, I am drawn to the complexity of a material's outward humbleness in the way it reveals or conceals itself in different contexts.

The questions I seek to answer are often found within the properties of the material itself. When bringing material elements together, it is an open-ended process that includes the space itself. In my noticing or 'reflective attention' and the subsequent engagement with a material, its previous use can be a starting point for an artwork, but its potential becomes more evident when relieved from its original function.

The ongoing life of the material

I choose common everyday materials for my artwork. They are utilitarian and a result of mass production and consumption. I pay a particular kind of attention to things that would otherwise be overlooked.

In some cases, they are left over from film jobs I have worked on. In the film industry, the fast pace of production means waste of resources and excess are prevalent. When I can, I save materials that I see potential in with the view of incorporating them into my artwork. I am linked to these materials through my actions and my history with them through my film work. I like to use what I have around me, things that already exist that can offer up a quality that can lead the direction of a work.

The use of repurposed material in my making is part of my ethos and is a political standpoint in this capitalist, colonialist environment. It is also a philosophical position threaded throughout my practice that privileges empathy for the ongoing life of a material. I enter into this relationship knowing that I am just one stage in its life which will continue on after its iteration as an artwork.

My practice is an attempt to question a colonial mindset, reflected in the problematic, capitalist ideology of utility and disposability. By taking a material beyond its given truth, beyond the space of its intended use, I wish to interrogate that system and to honour that the material exists. I find this idea particularly acute in considering material that has little or no monetary value.

The bigger question within this idea is the attitude to matter or material as a resource. To follow a material is to acknowledge its history, its genealogy, and its political and cultural context. It is to understand its existence as originating from the earth, its current state a result of a series of human-led processes. This shift in thinking can then make the distinction between the value vs the quality of a thing. The relationship becomes less about what can be extracted or imposed upon the material and more about the qualities recognised by investing time in a sympathetic relationship of making.

By way of illustration, a useful comparison can be made between my work in the film industry and my current art practice. In my art practice, I encounter possibility through a generative approach of purposeful production. My film work however, is a practiced collective enterprise to achieve constant results. Time, in this instance, is the limitation, often not the access to resources.

While this politically charged choice of material grounds my work in the every day, my focus is also on attentiveness beyond the practical. As Carl Mika states:

I wouldn't want to know, comprehend or understand something if there wasn't an instinctive, even unconscious, drive to orient towards it in the first place: I would need something to dictate my interest in the visible and invisible, in desiring to know at all.
(Mika, *Where Do We Stand When We Know*)

Usually, the material I inherit or find is limited. In learning how to work with it, I am conscious I might exhaust my supply, damage or destroy it, and each decision I make could undermine its potential and my own.

I am interested in the idea that the 'goal' is not a sense of closure or clarity but a questioning or a provocation instead—a state embodied during the process but also something that becomes an integral part of the ongoing life of the work.

The ephemerality of the final form my artwork takes is counter to the labour expended, particularly in terms of site-responsive installation. This acts as a challenge to the labour vs output relationship embedded within an industrial production cycle, and reconsiders the idea of purposeful production by taking every day utilitarian materials into this intuitive mode of practice.



Fig. 16. *Research image*, shop window, personal photograph by author, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024.

An example of this shift from functionality to sensory engagement emerged through my work with drop-cloth plastic during the year. I began noticing this material in shop windows as I walked around the city. It is familiar and utilitarian but also ethereal and beautiful. In the night light especially, it had a softening effect on the window spaces it was hung in, obscuring the view inside. The plastic drop-cloth seemed to draw light into itself; its drape and translucency and fluid organic form transcending its machined, synthetic state. I inherited some left over from another artist's project, and I began working with its volume, opacity and potential for movement in different iterations and different spaces.



Fig.17. *Untitled*, personal photograph by author, drop cloth plastic, Wainuiomata, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2023.

As I began to manipulate this material, I discovered its ability to draw the eye whilst simultaneously obscuring the view through its layers, and how it could occupy space at scale through the light play on its surface. It drew a continuous flow of light into itself. I could look through its physical presence, suggesting an invisibility and a duality as both object and phenomenon.

It responded to my presence as I moved around it, making visible the force of the air on its surface. Through my actions of arranging and activating the plastic in various spaces, I developed a deeper understanding of its fragility, as well as its seductive qualities of light and form. I worked firstly with the surface plane (fig.17) and progressed into three-dimensional space to explore its potential as an object.



Fig. 18. *Untitled*, personal photograph by author, drop cloth plastic, Wellington Working Men's Club, Cuba St, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024.

First, I start by noticing, then by understanding the forces of the material more immediately through movement and handling. I photograph it as I work, and eventually, I seek to resolve it through spatialisation, where it will either be physically integrated into its site or formed into a three-dimensional object. Each stage of this process provides insights and potential directions, but I find the most effective resolutions within three-dimensional forms. This is embedded in the relationality of being present with a sculptural work, the idea of having to hold it in your mind because you can't see it in its entirety. It is revealing and concealing itself as you move around it.

It is subject to the same environmental forces as the viewer: balance, weight, light, and scale. This creates a subconscious empathy and reduces the distance between what is seen and what is experienced.

My sculptural practice is a constant push /pull of an object's physical immediacy, alongside its resistance to being 'known' through narrative. To look through something, or to be affected by the feeling you experience in terms of its relationship to you in the space, is at odds with its edges, its tangibility. It is exhibiting its "dual presence and hiddenness."

I can explore the subtle shift between the material surface and the depths of light and shadow through the photographic image.

The invisible seer

Photography plays a vital role as documentation in my process particularly because of the transient and iterative nature of my work. But perhaps more importantly, I use photography as a way of extracting the work from myself. It allows an objectivity not possible when the work physically exists in the same space as the maker. I find the disconnection of the photographic image useful in capturing the potential of a work or material, particularly given my iterative process.

The role of the lens could also be attributed to the ways my work in film is orientated towards a fixed view, the single viewpoint of the camera.

The way I frame the shot allows me to negate the scale indicated by the work's architectural and spatial location. If I remove the cues, then scale becomes ambiguous and creates a sense of disorientation, moving the potential narrative reading towards abstraction. It becomes less tangible, not as subject to recognisable, locational forces.

As a maker, I try to understand the relationship between subjective experience vs objective view—two potential states of creating and experiencing an artwork, through photography. The matter is on a continuum, the work temporal, and the experience of it fleeting. The photographic image fixes the object in a moment.

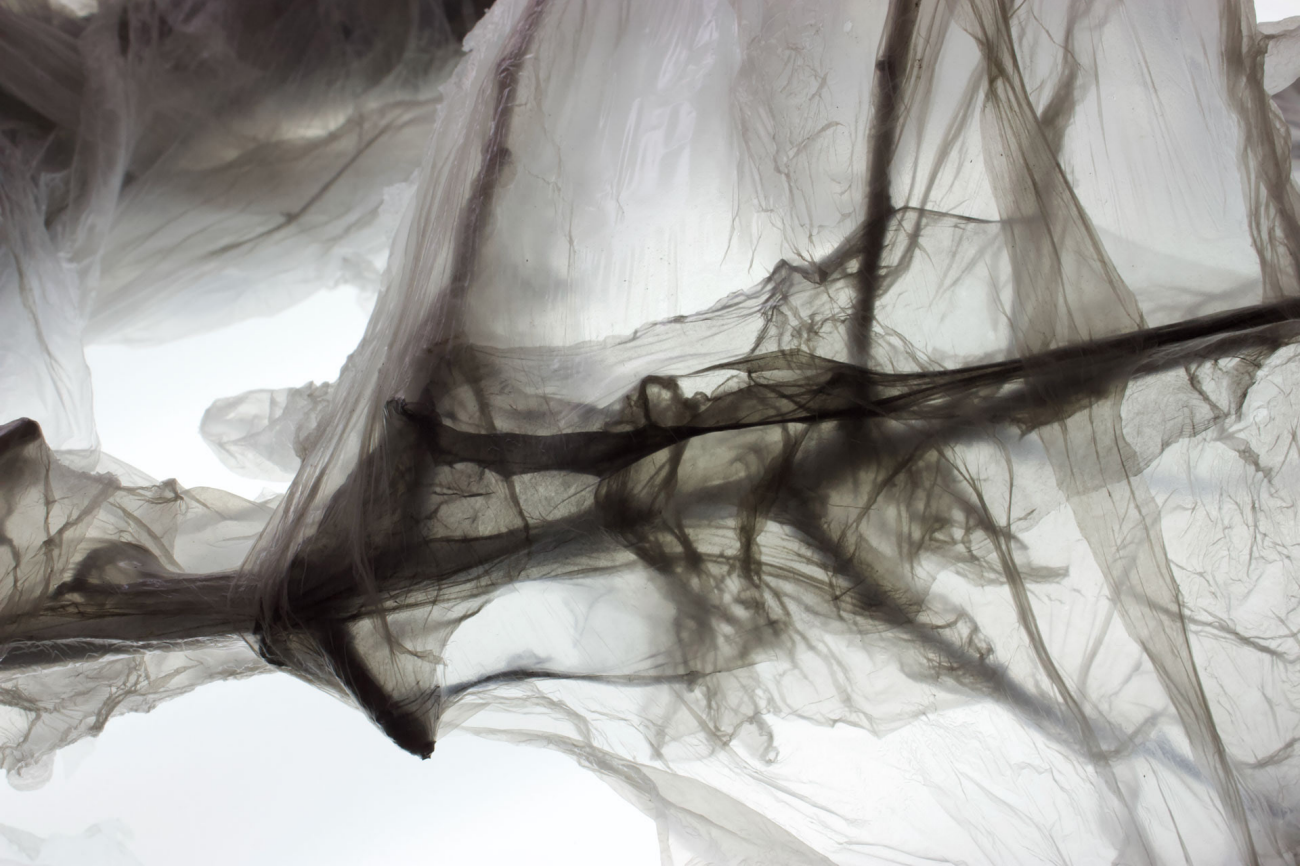


Fig.19. *Untitled*, personal photograph by author, drop cloth plastic and wood, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024.

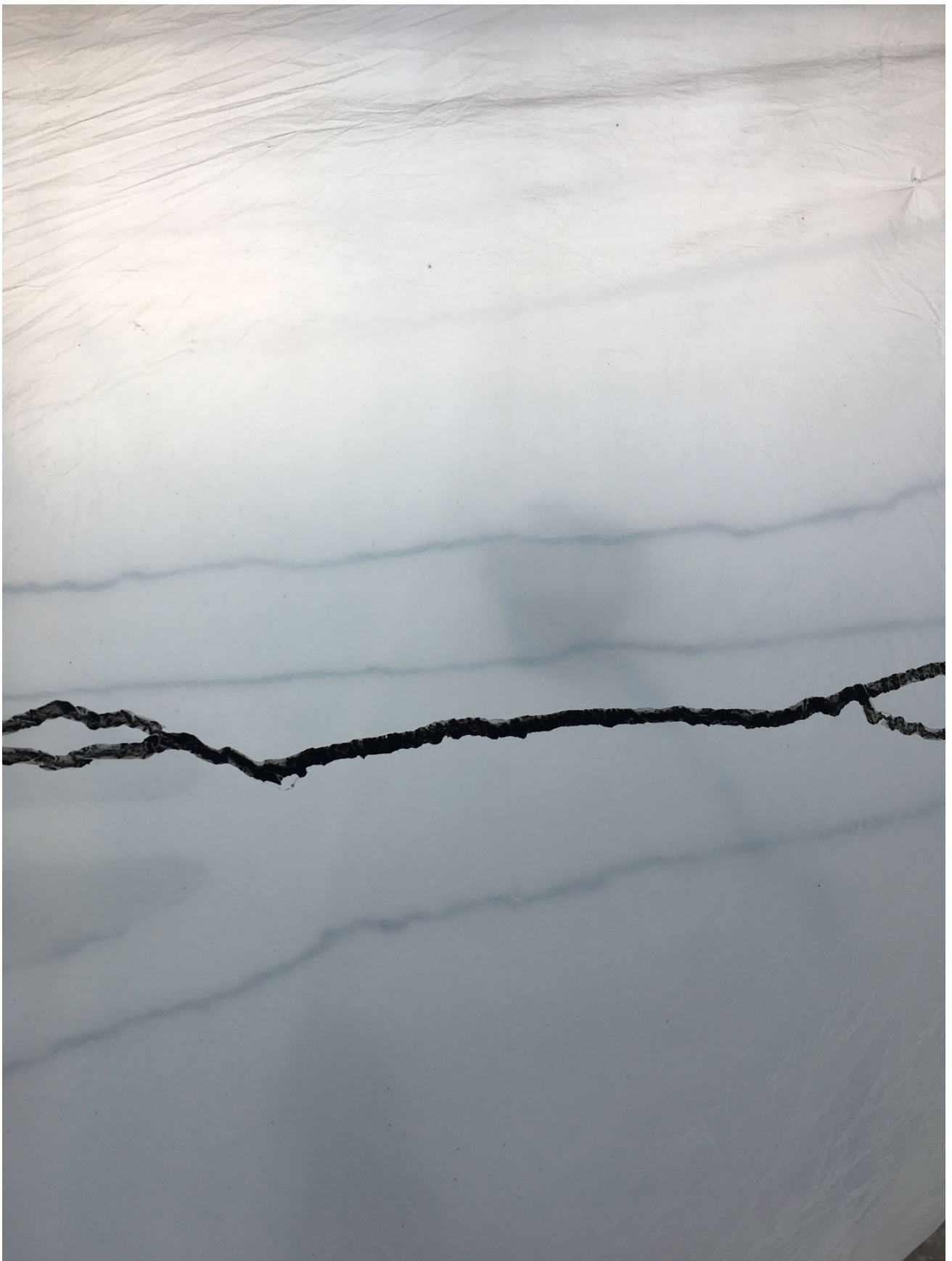


Fig. 20. *Untitled*, personal photograph by author, drop cloth plastic, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024.



Fig. 21. *Untitled*, personal photograph by author, drop cloth plastic, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024.



Fig. 22. *Aeon*, no flash. personal photograph by author, reflective ink on drafting paper, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024.

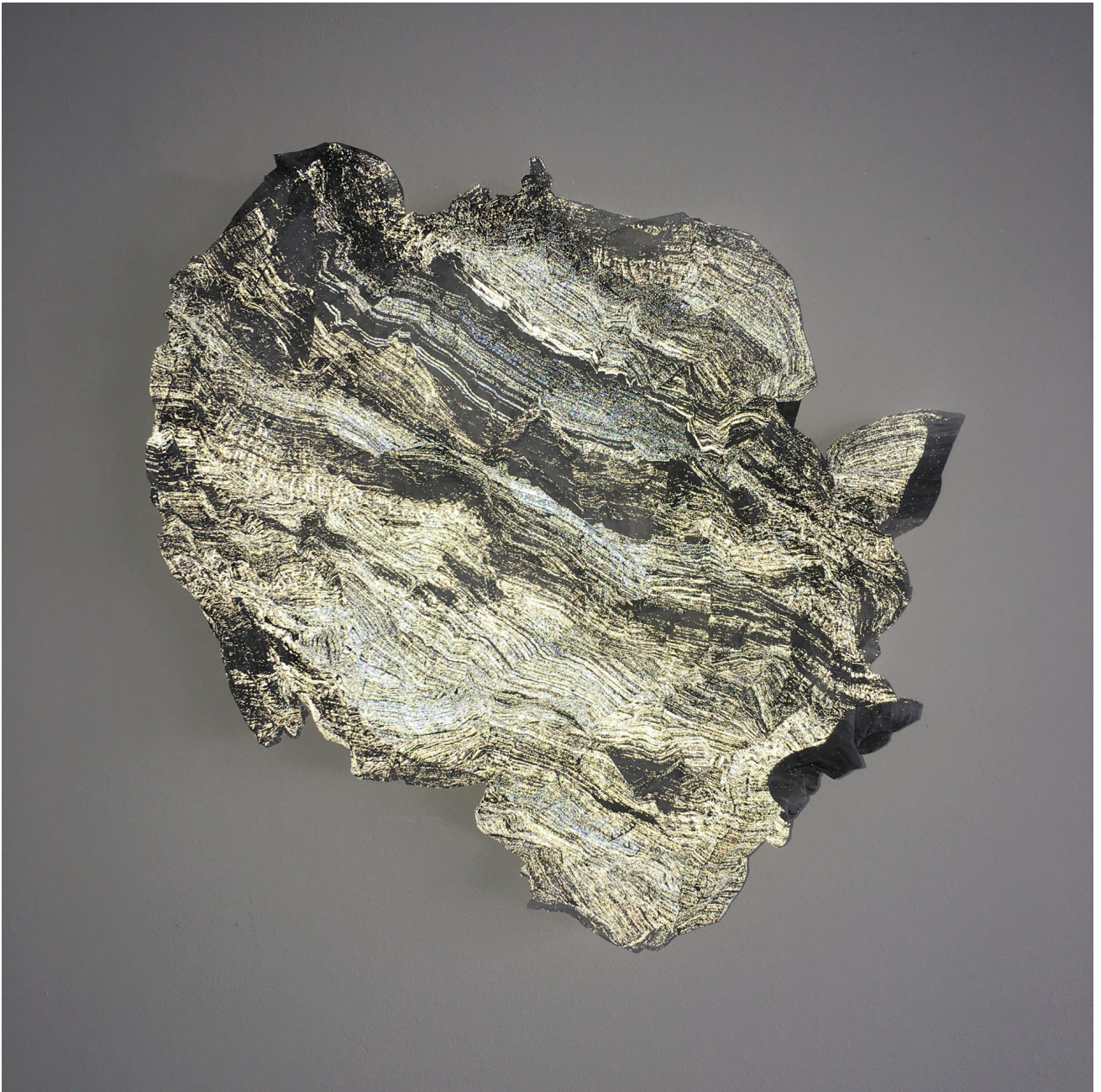


Fig. 23. *Aeon*, flash. personal photograph by author, reflective ink on drafting paper, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024



Fig. 24. Rhodes, Pauline. *Time Ongoing - Beach Extensum*. 2000, CoCA Centre of Contemporary Art Toi Moroki, Christchurch. Cloth on found driftwood.

Artist Pauline Rhodes' temporary placement of work in the landscape and her re-use of materials in her interior artworks speak to an open-endedness and ongoing process in her work.

Christina Barton writes about Rhodes' photographic practice, and her documentation of her temporary, site-specific sculptures in the environment:

She says:

Photographic recording involves the removal of the body and all trace of its prior activities, to reacquaint the artist with the object from a different perspective.

This is the viewpoint of the outsider, the invisible seer who reconstructs the scene and captures one of its many faces. The separation of the object from its maker is complete. (Barton 16)

The dual role of photography as both a tool and an indicator of time links to the ongoing nature of my work. As a tool, it takes me outside the internal activity of making. As an indicator of time, it articulates duration as a factor in the experience of a sculpture, its past, present and future captured in a moment.



Fig. 25. *To be sure, we are speaking*, personal photograph by author, repurposed paper and charcoal, 4mt x5.5mt, Engine Room Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024.

Phenomenality, making light quiet

As a participant in an experiential artwork, I am connected to the work through my sensory experience of the light, the material, the space—I am both complicit and implicit, affected and affecting. It is a phenomenological experience that is counter to the metaphysical dualism of subject/object which underpins the Western connection between ‘seeing’ or ‘knowing’. In that scenario, the object or artwork is passive and separate from active subject or ‘seer’. Or, as Maclean says:

The viewed object is known, or at least, reduced to the knowable through the gaze of the viewing subject. The gaze mediates the supposed ontological distance between the two, but (from the viewer’s perspective, anyway) is strictly one-way; the abyss may gaze back, but does the painting? (7)

Similar to Maclean in her discussion of the painting, I ask the same question of the artwork I created. When the work is considered through the phenomenological forces it is both subject to and affects, then the work’s supposed passivity and the viewer’s assumed objectivity are challenged, becoming an encompassing and relational experience.

I installed this site-responsive work (fig.25) in the floor-to-ceiling windows of the foyer of the Engine Room Gallery. It was comprised of re-purposed paper that I had manipulated and covered with charcoal. The opacity and texture of the paper and shifting tones of grey tempered the light in the room and gave it presence. An observer said that ‘it makes light quiet’.

The materiality of this work acted as an intermediary of the light conditions outside, equally balancing the push and pull of its surface qualities with the light as it passed through the material into the room.

In this installation, (fig.25) through its changeability and transformation of the space, the material’s physical presence shifted the focus from ‘what’ it was to what it was doing. With the lack of an object, the viewer was compelled to be held in a moment, to become aware of oneself in a space. Without narrative, the experience became about what was felt in relation to the viewer’s presence in the space.

Mika speaks to the agency embodied in this kind of connectivity:

Phenomenology therefore requires us to suspend the dominant expectation that the thing in front of us is all that there is to it. More than that, however, it asks of us to extend our speculations to the possibility that a thing has an actual effect on the world and hence our perception of it. (Mika, *The Co-Existence of Self and Thing Through Ira* 100)

Te Kawehau Hoskins and Alison Jones identify parallels with the Māori worldview and the theories of New Materialism, in which, “the identity of ‘things’ in the world is not understood as discrete or independent, but emerges through and relates to everything else. It is the relation, or connection, not the thing itself, that is ontologically privileged in indigenous and Māori thought.” (Hoskins and Jones 25)



Fig. 26. *To be sure, we are speaking*, detail. personal photograph by author, repurposed paper and charcoal, 4mt x 5.5mt, Engine Room Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024.

In my process I explore the ways light interacts with material, determining certain intangible qualities that emerge in a particular space. These markers are subjective and contingent. Artworks can encompass emotion, intuition, and the unknown through their very material and tangible presence. I am creating a connection rather than an object when this occurs.

Knowing is seeing. Light as knowledge

There is a strong metaphorical hierarchy within the English language where light represents clarity and illumination— to be ‘enlightened’, and darkness represents ignorance or the unknown—being ‘in the dark’. Both allude to knowledge within a binary of good and bad, an oppositional relationship existing between the two.

These value-laden attributes imposed on light and dark are embedded in Western language and cultural understanding. They are a remnant of the Christian association between God and ‘light’ and its association with the divine. In the enlightenment period in Europe, scientific observation and rational thought became the dominant marker of knowledge, and religion was rejected as the authority. What constituted reality was what was ‘seen’ and the scholarly activity of identifying through classification and partitioning became the measure of ‘knowing’.

But the ubiquitous ‘seeing is knowing’ metaphor is inherently biased and deficient, as Jessica Maclean points out:

What illicitly escapes scrutiny in scopic regimes is a metaphysical hierarchy in which some physical sense coupled with rationality is taken as the basis for knowledge. According to this kind of Enlightenment thinking, we come to belief and understanding through observation and reason. (8)

The limitation of this position is that to “privilege the eye as providing direct access to the world, and collapse seeing into knowing,” (Maclean 7) or, to perpetuate the idea that “knowledge is yoked conceptually and linguistically to sight” (Maclean 7) negates the importance of our relationship and understanding with what can’t be rationally explained, in other words, the unseen.

Something ‘seen’ or named is deemed separate from us, as if we are objective observers. It is known and understood not through its relationship with other things in the world but as a fragment.

Colonial constructs of metaphors of light and dark.

We are entangled in, and appropriated by, a colonial fixation on clarity, visibility and enlightenment - and this obsession does not treat obscurity, invisibility and endarkenment benevolently. In its drive to fix the identities of ourselves and other things in the world, the colonial project of high visibility and presence has dealt harshly with a mystery-inspired Māori relationship with objects. (Mika, *Subjecting Ourselves to Madness* 721)

Carl Mika expresses a Māori perspective on the fixation on clarity as a leading focus for colonial values. As an artist, I align with Mika's provocation of the inherent compromise (or failure) that exists through imposed ways of knowing that dismiss mystery or darkness as legitimate foundations (or conditions) for knowledge, experienced by Māori as a result of the colonisation of land as well as their worldview.

The above quote recognises knowledge through the metaphors of light and dark, pinpointing the perpetual hierarchy embedded in the colonial comprehension of these tangible and intangible elements. It bears out the underlying potential that a state of mystery and doubt provides for provoking further thought. In my work, the term 'latency' embodies this experience through my process, my autonomy as an artist, and the potential I pursue in the material. Through my research, I have noticed parallels in the way Māori scholarship speaks to metaphysical and philosophical concepts of the unknown, or the "real world behind the world of sense perception" (Marsden and Royal 95), that aligns with the creative and poetic relationships I explore through my art making.

Mika identifies the problematic 'othering' of things not in the light, through Western ideology which centres light as 'good' and associates it with the metaphysical notion of presence. By searching for clarity and "fixing the identities of ourselves and other things in the world" (Mika, *Subjecting Ourselves to Madness* 721), we adopt a colonial model of thinking with its associated hierarchy.

Alternatively, if we consider light and dark intertwined in a relationship of interdependence, then dark becomes present, contingent and encompassing. It is better for us personally and as a society if we understand each function within a relationship of duality and comprehend them relative to that understanding. Because once we privilege one thing, we destroy something else.

Interdependence of light and dark; the grey, liminal, tonal shift

Through my artwork, I explore how light and dark are experienced intuitively and emotionally; they are strong relational and phenomenological mechanisms. We observe them both physically in their material reality and as a tangible connection between an object and a viewer. However, what they represent through their mutable qualities speaks to a more profound, enveloping, intangible connection to the temporal and cyclic nature of life. They are a marker of time, the experience of light and dark is of duration. Light and dark can activate a state of contemplation and reflective attention as we become aware of ourselves in a fleeting moment.

Dark and light play a critical role in the interpretation of any artwork regardless of the artist's approach. For example, the presence of light can draw attention to specific aspects of the artwork and its relationship with the space it occupies. Equally, darkness can direct the eye away from the unnecessary and towards a chosen focus beyond the "scopic regimes" of light and dark as purely visual elements. (Maclean 1)



Fig. 27. *Hinterland*, personal photograph by author, reflective textile ink on builders paper, Engine Room Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2023.

Material temporality

It is compelling as an artist to work with dark spaces. It demands a particular kind of attention from the viewer, of calm and introspection. Part of my development last year was exploring the properties of reflective screen printing ink, a material I had inherited from my textile work which necessitated a dark space where I could control the light.

Through working with this material, I began to understand the important role of space in the activation of an artwork and how the qualities of light can become integral to the concept.

The work above (fig.27) was placed in a narrow room visible through an open door. It faced exterior windows, and when the viewer was in complete alignment with the sunlight as they entered the room, the reflective surface was revealed to them. As they moved into the space the surface returned to black—the moment gone.

The work was active and responsive and connected to the mutable qualities of light. The hidden quality of the material revealed only for a moment, highlighting the temporal nature of the work. This relationship between material, time and light continues to be where I work as an artist.



Fig. 28. *Calligraph*, personal photograph by author, reflective textile ink on builders paper, Engine Room Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2023.

In relationship to the space they are in

My site-responsive work is informed and inspired by the potential of a specific space. This aligns with my use of repurposed material, in the way a material can lead the direction of a final form.

My approach to the relationship between space and material has been influenced by looking at the work of artist Isabella Loudon in how she adapts her sculptural practice to different locations. She works both site specifically—improvising her installation work by building in situ—as well as using her studio as a ‘rehearsal space’ and transferring the work into the gallery setting.

For example, her exhibition *Platforms*, 2019 (fig.29) was created utilising the gallery as studio space in the lead-up to the exhibition and brings together in situ workings, materials and objects from her studio.



Fig. 29. Loudon, Isabella. *Platforms*. Cement, Twine, Steel. 2019. Courtesy Robert Herald Gallery, Te Whanganui-a-Tara. Exhibited at City Gallery Wellington Te Whare Toi 2019 – 2020.

In correspondence with the artist via email, I asked her some questions about the specific ways space informs her work:

Q: “The boundaries of ‘works in a space’ vs ‘site-responsive’ installation are merged in your work because you often create the work in the gallery environment and as such challenge the ‘objectness’ of art. Can you speak to this movement between these different modes of practice?”

A: “I almost always think of the space as being part of the work and so I think this denies the ‘objectness’. When making objects I’m constantly thinking about how they are with other objects/materials in my studio, and then how they might be integrated into/presented in a space. Whether it is working site responsively or creating objects (or both), it is initially the limits (or potential) of my materials that determine the form, and then their relationship to the space. The objects are individual and can be shown without the installation and the installation could be redeveloped/upscaled for an entirely different space without other objects”.

She writes about the importance of her body as a measure of spatial understanding. She says:

A: “Scale is significant in all my work but it’s a feeling, not a measurement. I like to study a space with my body. Touching different textures, pacing out the scale and observing the way it way it feels to be a body in that space, moving around and through it.”

This articulates a central part of my process which is to understand the space through my own body’s relationship to it.

Throughout my study, my opportunity to work on a large scale has increased incrementally over time. Last year I worked in a stairwell on campus to achieve height, this year I worked in an empty shop studio (fig.30) that provided me with enough space to work on multiple works at once.



Fig. 30. *Research image*, shop window, personal photograph by author, Wainuiomata, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024.

In August this year, I was given the opportunity to occupy this large disused building (fig. 33-35) for my final exhibition, and am currently in the first stages of absorbing and understanding its potential. It is a derelict space, it has beautiful light and is vast in area at 1700 square meters. I can rehearse in the space, and spend time reconfiguring my materials for the site. My 'way of proceeding' entails bringing in my previous work, my materials, tendencies...responses to scale, light, and feeling. I will build, document and rebuild until I find the resonance between my work and the latent qualities of the building.

During this, two questions arise: What is the lightest touch with the most effect I can implement? And what is the space offering if I spend the time to notice?

Residue, Time, Light, Scale, Temporality, History, Potential.

Workbook entry: impressions of the space upon entering...

"...it is expansive, and the light is soft and almost physical, there is a horizon line of light pouring onto the floor. There is a sense of time within the residue of what has been stripped away, a sense of 'waiting'. Layers of old concrete on the walls. There is a precarity, the metal struts focusing the eye on the structure of the architecture. Pre-existing presence of people, history...it is quiet, apart from the noises from the street below and the creaking of the apartment dwellers above.

The green floor border of the underlay, dried and broken matches the broken glass in the far room, and the watermarks on the concrete floor from the rain getting in through the smashed window. The light passing through the interior concrete window, all the nails and hooks and wires that previously held something now gone. The smell of damp, of dust."



Fig. 33. *Research image*, personal photograph by author, Wellington Working Men's Club, Cuba St, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024



Fig. 34. *Research image*, personal photograph by author, Wellington Working Men's Club, Cuba St, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024



Fig. 35. *Research image*, personal photograph by author, Wellington Working Men's Club, Cuba St, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024



Fig. 36. *Untitled*, personal photograph by author, paper and charcoal, Wellington Working Men's Club, Cuba St, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024

This photo series (fig. 36-37) is a site and light response using charcoal-covered paper from a previous installation, activated by the afternoon light in the space. The forms glow for a defined length of time each day, precariously balanced on their ends. Each morning, when I return, some of them have fallen due to the draught from the windows. They operate similarly to my earlier reflective work in the dark space, which had a much more momentary relationship to light.

These works represent my preliminary activities in entering the space, to understand how I might orientate or locate my work subject to the duration of the light conditions offered throughout the day.

My temporary arrangements of materials are a drawing process, a way of proceeding that aids my spatial understanding. By testing found materials, and integrating my existing library into the space, I search for resonance. I can facilitate through these actions, the dynamic relationship between the space and the materials.



Fig. 37. *Untitled*, personal photograph by author, paper and charcoal, Wellington Working Men's Club, Cuba St, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, 2024

Conclusion

This research has reinforced the value of remaining open to the unknown—both as an artist and as a way of being in the world. My making and research this year have expanded my understanding of what it means to ‘know’ something, revealing the limitations of empirical, vision-centric models of knowledge. I have embraced the mystery, uncertainty, and the “dual presence and hiddenness” of objects, and, in the process, have cultivated a more nuanced and relational way of engaging with materials and spaces. (Mika qtd. in Maclean 24)

By engaging deeply with everyday materials and responding intuitively to architectural spaces, I have developed a process-driven approach that privileges the agency and voice of matter. I have learned to listen and to trust my gut.

My process acknowledges the inherent autonomy of materials and spaces, in this, I am often searching for latent qualities, which manifest through phenomenological experience and embodied knowledge. This is the foundation of creating site-responsive installations, and material-led artworks. It is where “things disclose themselves when we choose to pay attention and remain silent otherwise,” (Maclean 33).

I have delved further into the cultural and philosophical implications of light and dark and how rethinking these binaries can reveal an ideological position, manifested through my art practice.

Creating this body of work has been transformative. By giving myself the time and freedom to consider my potential as an artist, I have learned how I can determine the conversation between the artist and artwork – and therefore, the potential offered by the artwork for the viewer. This experience has reinforced my autonomy as an artist.

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[who-do-we-think-we-are?publication_id=2474650&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=email-share&triggerShare=true&r=1bwex3](https://sinclairr.substack.com/p/who-do-we-think-we-are?publication_id=2474650&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=email-share&triggerShare=true&r=1bwex3).

Acknowledgements

To:

Eli
Simeon
Hemi
Lisa
Julieanna
Therese

And to my family, friends and MFA cohort,

Thank you for all your support and encouragement.

And to my Mum.