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*I've been thinking about the sun lately:
A painterly exploration of place, time and ecology.*

By Mia Toni Morris

Abstract

This Exegesis discusses a range of painterly and sculptural installations that inform and explore time, sunlight, ecology and the importance of place. I use abstraction and post minimalism's emphasis on materiality, site and colour as a method of making, thinking and inquiring. This project is openly precarious and intentionally focused on subtleties.

I am interested in translating the critical and often poetic experience of living on the South Coast of Te Whanganui-a-Tara, in Tapu Te Ranga, Island Bay into forms that open a greater understanding and awareness of place, mindset, and behaviour. It is grounded in the spaces I occupy: observing and analysing the nuanced and changing conditions of place, in light of the climate crisis.

These installations are located in relation to other artists, writers, poets, and philosophers, finding a common thread of environmental concerns, and an awareness of self, place and time. While importantly exploring art and writing as a way of understanding and connecting sustainably and consciously to our immediate surroundings.

The sun rises and sets, over land and over us. Time and time again, a continuous loop that goes on forever. It is central and centred, bright and hazy. It talks around us. I think about how it marks the passing of time and its poetic resonance. I think about how it is the only reason we can see colour; without it, we would live in a grey-scaled, monochromatic world.

I wonder how the sun and everything it reaches can feel so warm and important one day but not the next. I look at the shadow it casts over my paintings, shifting and altering the colours, turning them into a live painting. I think about how my clay and metal sculptural objects echo throughout the space through their shadows.

Tracking a day, a year, a decade, a century. It is ancient, as old as time. The sun god Ra is an image I have returned to many times, the oldest deity of Ancient Egypt. As time passed, he merged with other gods, splitting in two becoming, Ra-Horakhty ~ *the morning sun* ~ and Atum ~ *the evening sun* ~. Riding over the sky worlds above through to the underworlds below, transforming as he made the journey. There is a beautiful, powerful sense of energy in this idea, as the sun feels so distinctively different in the morning than in the evening.

But it has gone behind a cloud now so I can't write about it anymore.

This is a meditation / reflection / exploration of the sun's indexical and shifting relationship to time and how we might experience it through *observation*, *perception* and *place*. This is specifically explored by considering the porous boundaries of painting and sculpture as they relate to everyday life. As there is arguably no start and no end as such, each small fragment represents a portion of my current thinking. There is a distinct repetition and symmetry to my practice and life, with ideas unfolding and emerging as time moves forward. A continuous, rhythmic cycle that centres around the South Coast of Te Whanganui-a-Tara, in Tapu Te Ranga, Island Bay.

I approach space with my own painterly and sculptural sensibilities, using abstraction, minimalism and colour as a method of making, thinking and inquiring rather than an aesthetic style. This project is precarious and intentionally focused on subtleties. It is committed to a certain kind of *experience* in the hope of finding optimism and a positive way forward during an era seeped in crisis. It is a continuous progression of consciousness through the act of making, writing and researching. Through a practice-based methodology involving iterative installations, I want a space to evoke a poetic visual landscape that offers insights into the ideas of soft, slow living and self-reflexivity around the significance of place.

I am drawn to the nuance of the everyday and how we find beauty in the mundane. The roads we walk, the beaches we return to and the rocks we stop to look at, the various ways we notice these comparatively small things are relevant to this project. The wondrous thing about everyday observation of existence is that it never stays the same, so even within our seemingly repetitious lives, we are always in the midst of change and uncertainty.

For this project I have taken particular note of this statement by painter Agnes Martin;

I don't paint about the world. Everybody else is painting about the world. That's enough. I am simply painting a concrete representation of abstract emotions such as innocent love, and ordinary happiness. I do want an emotional response. And I paint about emotions, not about lines. The truth is that it's not the lines that express the emotion. It's the scale of the composition. You know, if you go into a room that has perfect scale, you feel it. And it's the same with a painting. If the painting has perfect scale, it moves you. And you have different scales to show different emotions. It's the space between the lines that counts (Martin 6).

~Materiality ~ The strength of softness~

I have been investigating time and light within the specific context and materiality of abstraction (*painting*). I aspire to have the emotional resonance of colour, gesture, form and placement take precedence over framing a narrative or representation of a place. To think about and with materials in order to better work out the balance between making and simply being. Sometimes I hang fabric on the wall or simply leave it on the ground. There is a long waiting time that comes with an investment in materials. I look for tones, marks, folds, weaves and patterns. I am trying to understand the act and process of art making through close analysis of materiality.

To let *time* and *light* into the work I have predominately been working with translucent fabrics. Allowing them to become a veil, something between the painting and the viewer, something between the meaning and the image. The edges and boundaries of the art and room are softened and blurred according to the time of day, the colour of light and surrounding weather conditions.

The layers and values created form a clear relation to distance and placement, with the space you can see and the space you can stand in - but not necessarily at the same time. It is the length between the two points that interests me ~ physically between my paintings and the hanging sculptures but also between experience and meaning. I see it as a reflective, generative space where the ideas and agencies of softness and slowness can rest and mediate our response to the work, thoughts and memories that are recalled by standing amidst the work.

I see softness and slowness as essential when it comes to re-thinking our (Western, Pākehā) relationship to the land. There is so much listening and learning that needs to be done, and this is our time to be soft, malleable and open to knowledge out there that can help foster a deeper more loving connection to everything around us. Rangi Mātāmua has been incredibly insightful and motivating towards helping me understand what this means and how important it is for Pākehā to listen, accept and act sensitively:

Throughout the world, there is greater awareness about the environment, and the general public are beginning to understand the negative impact humans are having on the natural world. Many are exploring indigenous knowledge systems as pathways to more sustainable forms of living (...) questions are also being asked about the relevance of our modern system of time that is based on a northern hemisphere perspective (Mātāmua).

Mātāmua text; *Matariki and the Decolonisation of Time* shares vital information from the perspective of indigenous custodians of the land, highlighting the importance of time, slow living and looking closely at the earthly changes around us and how it is literally written in the stars. Mātāmua comments that western time has been used to organise people, places and behaviour in a way that is at odds with the rhythms of the sky, earth and self (Mātāmua). He compares this to Matariki which is; “A multi-layered time system that utilizes observation (...) A system driven by the environment” (Mātāmua)

Ecologist Geoff Park’s book *Theatre Country – Essays on landscape and Whenua* also touches on these concepts of environmental-based systems and indigenous knowledge leading the way forward. Parks urges Pākehā to develop an understanding of what living in Aotearoa means, surrounded by the Pacific Ocean and the varying degrees of political agency that comes with being a coastal dweller and observer:

Surely there could be a more indigenous life than we live. There could be a consciousness that would establish itself in a place by understanding its nature and learning what is potential in it... Until we understand what the land is, we are at odds with everything we touch. And to come to that understanding...we have to re-enter the woods” (9) Park further states; “you cannot act well in a place until you have understood what nature intended for it (12).

This is a concept I am constantly grappling with as a Pākehā woman in Aotearoa making artwork informed by the ocean. Through my art and research, I want to be more conscious of what it means to truly love a place. Park’s chapter *Extinction wave or healing tide* addresses ways of moving forward that deviate from the Capitalist demands of Western mainstream life and suggests that the “real work is with ourselves; that behind the human love of nature lies the potential for a more sustainable psychology” (72). Park suggests that through small, accumulative and thoughtful change, we as individuals can make a difference.

I have been working on a series of installations that are a *lament* or *love letter* to the land, and coastal dwellers alike that address this crisis.

My installation *~I Heard the Sun Dancing, 2022~* intends to understand and explore the relationship between the physical aspects of climate change that I can see from my home with rising tide lines and summer droughts and our capacity to find love and hope within this. At this time I was reading Tim Winton's book, *Island Home, a Landscape Memoir* which is a poetic account of his time spent in Western Australia;

This country leans in on you. Like family. To my way of thinking, it is family... I had a feel for the time of the wattle, the up-close leafiness of lichen. I knew the pong of the kelp and seagrass signified the arrival of the afternoon breeze. When the southerly really got going it rattled the pods of the wild lupins and corrugated the surface of the swamp [...] Where the yellow sand makes a warm pad to lie on beneath the rattling banksias, they didn't just make the world more comprehensible but rendered it intimate, even sacred (Winton 58).

These feelings of love and understanding, of stillness and quietness, of closeness and vastness that Winton's words imply are nuanced but direct, carrying lessons about looking closer, at movement and texture, and understanding nature as part of ourselves. I believe that a lack of love of this land (from a Pākehā perspective) has contributed to the cultural and environmental divide of Aotearoa, much like Australia.

I can *feel* Winton's dedication to writing, documenting, remembering and recalling, surfing, walking, rainforests, marshlands and nomads. These underlying themes seem to intertwine and weave themselves into his stories even if he does not explicitly say it, it is still there. This is what draws me in and creates an ongoing experience and encounter with his writing. Something I think art can position itself to do also, by asking you to draw upon what you know and how you feel in a particular moment.



I Heard the Sun Dancing, 2022



I Heard the Sun Dancing, 2022 (Detail)

The space is divided by hanging paintings and bells that act as observational devices to look, hear and move through. Attempting to physically change the lens in which we see the room through.

I used diluted raw sienna, burnt sienna and umber pigments to reference a sun-faded or drought-stricken land to dye pieces of cotton, silk and canvas. The paint dripped down the surface and formed lines, pooling at the edges transferring pigment between patches, exploring ideas of time and saturation, and embracing a certain amount of chance with how the colour turned out.

The sun and wind activate the artwork and gently direct your attention and movement as the fabric and bells sway. I am interested in creating a particular type of engagement and collaboration with my surroundings, one that does not ask anything precise of my surroundings but rather sits alongside it. The same sun and wind that blew the fabric dry, blows through the space, the sun shines through the fabric, casting shifting shadows around the room, streaming through the more translucent patches and soaking into the opaquer ones becoming an extension of the work and space.

The five bells hang almost always silently in the space. As part of my extended dialogue of fleeting moments and sensory experiences I wanted them to reference *~the disappearing sounds of the ocean~* as they hang in anticipation of wind, or of a hand reaching out.

Anticipation is a noun that refers to waiting, it does not demand anything nor stop anything.

We've all heard bells and they call us for many reasons. The sound of two solid materials vibrating and ringing out into space. Traditionally bells are used for ceremonies, a call to order or even a warning sound. They can symbolise beginnings, endings, joy, freedom and mourning (Bellringing).

The act of displacing them outside the context of what they are usually used for and into the realm of painting and sculpture interests me because I believe that's when they start to talk about things beyond just function and use. I am intrigued by how the sounds, echoes and forms can extend the boundaries of these disciplines as sound manifests itself in real time and place. Offering a different sensorial way of connecting to our environments in modes that move past fact and information. Much like Parks and Matamua's beliefs around a system built on care, noticing and connecting that can inform alternative attitudes for considering the changes in our environments.

Although gentleness is an important quality in my practice, I believe this work was *too* gentle. I am not sure if it is asking the viewer to renegotiate the space or their position to sunlight, beyond inviting them to move around the curtain and into a passage of sun. The paintings are curtain like as they hang almost centered in the room shading the windows, implying maybe they were something to pleasantly live with and not move around.



I Heard the Sun Dancing, 2022 (Detail)

Art that sits between *being* and *acting* as everyday object interests me in the way it makes you considered the multiple functions they take on in and outside the gallery (or studio) walls, how they can speak to many things. I understand Kate Newby's work to be exploring these ideas. For example, in the work: *letting the other thing in*, 2013 there is a deliberate casualness and an intriguing intersection between objects and art. Newby's objects seem to be inadvertently yet actively in collaboration with spaces they are shown in, A rock with the word 'TRY' painted onto it was placed in Albert Park as part of her Auckland Art Gallery Exhibition, *I'm just like a pile of leaves*, 2011. Seeing it you might think try what? Or is it perhaps just a statement of our times with a conflicting message of both softness and harshness.

Newby employs installation art to create space for pondering thoughts and the intrinsic relationship it forms with impermanence and the passing of a day. And knowing that installations often exist for a limited amount of time in a particular space, I want to further explore and push ideas that relate to fleeting moments, with particular reference to sunlight and climate change. I still want to have a minimal amount of materials and objects in the space but through placement and deeper consideration of movement I wish to more directly and urgently communicate these ideas.

~ Ominous Wave ~

I am worried I love surfing more than making art.

Both connect me to the things I love but they are so temporal and ephemeral. A passing wave and an installation coming down. The echo of a bell that no longer rings and the white path of where a wave has broken and rolled ashore. Surfing and art used to give me the same feeling, but the state of the world has confused my connection to art making. Everything feels so fleeting and desperate now, huge problems come in and out of focus but are never in sight long enough to be fixed. We pledge, then we apologize. There are more storms, I am getting much better at riding bigger waves now.

The New Zealand government's newly released 'National Adaptation Plan 2022' to address climate change admits that the effects are now *unavoidable*, and we need to accept that some coastal communities will have to be relocated. Their homes will be lost and claimed by the ocean. Drenched, saturated, submerged, gone. They call it "managed retreat" (Ministry for the Environment, 2022). Growing up I was always acutely aware of this fragile ecosystem. I used to imagine that our garden would become a beach or that our house would become a giant saltwater swimming pool.

Unavoidable: "not able to be avoided, prevented, or ignored; inevitable" (Oxford Dictionary). These words carry cold harsh realities that leave echoes of sadness.

My neighbour Ken who is 85 years old (I think he is a Socialist), told me the other day that I wouldn't live to be 75 because the world won't allow it. I thought about this as I walked down the staircase to my house with soft yellow pigment ready to dye clay the colour of sunshine, wondering what it all meant. I'm 27 years old and scared.

Author Kathleen Dean Moore recognises the urgency of climate change through subjective, observational writing. Moore's "writing evokes the flow, life, sound and movement of water, thus reflecting the emotional current (...) providing a model for environmental thought and action, as we move closer and closer towards a climate breakdown" (Henwood 75).

In Moore's book *Pine Island Paradox*, she talks in depth about a small tidal Island in the Pacific Northwest of America – how the feeling and atmosphere of the place changes with the tides. Moore writes of sunbathing seals on exposed mud flats, floating bushes, bird watching, and of her children.

Rocking in my kayak, I watched my son perch at the crest of the island. His attention had been caught by something far out at sea (...) He raised his arms and pointed. It was a pod of dolphins, silver curves jumping in unison, shining just for a moment, then sliding into the sea. I believe that the most loving thing you can say to a person is 'look' - two people standing side by side, looking out together at the world. When people learn to look, they begin to see, really see. When they begin to see, they begin to care. And caring is the portal into the moral world (Moore 49).

The memories drawn upon here depict her ethics around caring, ecology and environmentalism. She immerses you in the place so you can observe alongside her, contemplating what it means to be kin with nature.

Moore writes about the hidden substance that connects everything on this earth ~ water ~. Bodies of water are becoming a marker of environmental change (Henwood), through sea-level rise, floods, heavy rain and storms, or lack of water, bringing droughts, fires, and disappearing lakes and rivers. This is something that both environmental scientists and indigenous communities have been telling us for years. To care and be cared for in return.

Artist Christian Dimick, who also lives on the South Coast takes note of this connectedness and shared respect for the place where you live in his recent show at Parlor Projects *Sea-saw*, (2022), where the ocean is of particular importance, both in the meaning and the process of abstract painting.

No matter where you go in Aotearoa, you are never very far from the ocean. The sound of the surf and the muttering clatter of shingle or the hiss of waves retreating over sand are baked into our consciousness. No matter how determined you are to put distance between point A and point B, there always remains a lingering knowledge that, eventually, you will simply run out of island (Dimick).

Dimick's *Yellow Truck (Revised)* is painted in milky airy washes reminiscent of a soft Lyall Bay sunset. These sections are broken up with more direct gestural marks that rhythmically roll across the surface, you can almost picture the motion of an arm going around. There is a reflexiveness in this work, of spending time by the ocean and the process of mark-making, they are both constantly evolving and folding back on themselves. Dimick uses a beautiful metaphor for his paintings, that they are tugboats for ideas and values. There is a fluid notion relating to this, that suggests one thing leads to another, and that your ideas and everyday experiences intrinsically sit alongside each other. Art pulling along ideas or ideas pulling along art.



Christian Dimick, *Yellow Truck (Revised)*, 2022

~ Colour in Light of Minimalism ~

I have long been influenced by Californian Minimalism, where light became a primary material, physically and conceptually as a move away from the canvas and the more traditional parameters. There is an ambient nature to the L.A based minimalists of the 1960s with wanting to define tone, atmosphere and attitude.

Robert Irwin and Dough Wheeler's use of materials were reflective of their lifestyles and values, noting that the: "surf and car culture with their glinting, obsessively maintained surfaces, and the geography and palpable sunlight of California" (Feldman 21) ~ a reductive, geometric and sensorial response to the world around them.

A key idea of this minimalism is to activate the relationship between the object, the space and the viewer with all three being connected and equally important in the meaning and response of the experience.

Artist Olafur Eliasson manifests these central principles and beliefs of the Californian Light and Space movement but within a contemporary context, influenced by the effects of climate change. Eliasson has continued to shift light, colour and objects into the wider realm of bodily experience: to think about (sun)light within the context of 2022 has massive implications on our experience of it, with rising global temperatures compared to the 1960s. Moving away from light being predominantly about pure perception and into a realm where it points to issues beyond itself. With his long-standing interest in nature and weather conditions, Eliasson draws upon memory, serenity, transformation, illumination, perception and uncertainty to immitate natural phenomena from an artist's perspective.

I attended Eliasson's retrospective exhibition at the Tate Modern in London in 2019. I remember entering; *Your Blind Passenger* (2010), an enclosed corridor filled with foggy, dense light and damp air. It became so bright and uncomfortable that I was trying to move quickly through it, but I was hyperaware I could not see my feet. As I moved forward, the light became warmer and I found myself surrounded by my favourite colour, Naples yellow. It was so soft and calming, I stood still, smiling. London was grey, greyer than I could have ever imagined, I almost appreciated the brown River Thames because it was the only thing that was not a shade of grey, but now I was standing amidst yellow. The yellow that is painted in almost every room of my childhood home. For me, it is the colour of warmth and happiness. I continued moving forward and the hue gained in intensity. Now it was sunset orange, deep and bright, resembling the feeling you get if you look at the sun for too long and all sorts of colours dance across your eyelids. A door was coming up, it led into a room filled with *The Glacier Melt photos* (1990 – 2019), climate change had slipped back into my mind. I was confronted with just how fast geological time is moving, as these photos were taken 20 years apart. Visually his work gives you nowhere to hide, it surrounds you, swallowing your whole body and mind. The ice is melting, the landscape is struggling. I walked away slowly but not as slowly as I approached it.

On one hand, Eliasson's work sets up moments to rest among gentle tonalities, but on the other hand, he took me somewhere very specific and directive through the extreme sense of immersion. He exposes us to multiple perspectives and narratives all at once perhaps urging us to enjoy a sense of uncertainty.

~Sand Blows Through My Bedroom Window~ 2021



~*Sand Blows Through My Bedroom Window*~ 2021, is a rhythmical arrangement of art objects and colours intended to evoke ideas around the ever-present threat of our coastline disappearing. I painted the room *emerald pool* green from the windowsills down. A pair of patchwork paintings, an underwater photo, a piece of gifted Japanese fabric, a stool and some painted linen are placed around the room. The space is bathed in all-day sun, filling the whole space with a glowing green hue.

I wanted the painting to suggest the idea of a flooded house or an empty swimming pool where a mark or stain is left behind. A time stamp where colour (painting) operates within its own boundaries of space. Here a new horizon line is implied, submerging you from the waist down, it is a wakeup call, a visual impression and observation of where we are heading with sea level rise. A meandering pace is needed to notice more subtle moments; like the rose-coloured thread that hums in the seam of the painting against the green wall.

The terms *meandering* and *nuance* share links and parallels that relate to my art practice. Both are seemingly simple and hint ~in this case~ towards a way of noticing that informs a pace of life and type of social behavior that acknowledges the variations and complexities of the world. *Meandering* is to follow a winding course, to follow thought and sight as it unfolds in front of you. It is to walk slowly, sometimes without direction ~ walking by feeling~. It is widely associated with walking in nature and not necessarily to get anywhere in particular. *Nuance* is the subtle differences, contrasts and distinctions between two things, something that is easily missed. Both these words possess qualities of quietness and carefulness through action and train of thought. I have been exploring how my paintings, installations and processes can follow a similar path and methodology to these words.



Sand Blows Through My Bedroom Window, 2021 (Detail)



Stool, 2021

The stool I made had a loose cotton seat and was positioned facing the window. It only suggested the idea of sitting, alluding to being still, being *held*. This lent the impression that if you were to sit, you would have a view of the ocean, but that was not my intention. The world is filled with seats for every situation: for typing, driving, eating, being old in, getting your teeth pulled out, for flying over many seas. Then there is mine, an unseatable seat.

Linking back to the terms meandering and nuance, in my artworks and writing it is important that there is space ~in all aspects of the word ~ to work towards recognising the importance of process and experience over purpose of resolution. I am not interested in a clear definition of why or how, but more in the multiple possibilities of everything. Kate Newby addresses the importance of this, “I like empty space, especially empty gallery space. I think using a lot of specific information and objects can be distracting” (Newby 26). This intentionally gentle approach I am taking is a response to the threats and uncertainty of what is happening around us in the hopes of informing alternative mindsets for the ways we occupy time and space.

~ The Length of Time ~

I spent my whole last summer by the sea. Above the surface I sat on a blue monochrome stretching as far as the eye could see, waiting. I didn't look at the time but sometimes I thought about it. In terms of tides and what colour the sky was. I would listen to the distant sound of waves breaking and the time between them ~ to tell if the swell was building. There's a lot of space being by the sea. I eventually stopped thinking about time and distance because everything seemed to have its own pace and repetition, and that was enough. Then I saw a great white shark.

What time was it? How close was it? Where has it gone? Is it feeding time? Resting time?

The Dutch psychiatrist J.H Van de Berg has a theory that proposes as the context and content of a day shifts, time shifts alongside it. On one morning, time might feel like it is running out while the next it is stretching out. I am interested in this idea in relation to behaviour. Both are in flux, constantly shaping and reshaping our perception of time.

A day is a unit of time that should be taken seriously. Yet this unit of time reveals, within the limits of its duration, differences [...] Surely, we cannot say that the road one walks in the winter has the same length as in the summer (Berg 109).

The walk to the surf break feels longer now.

I am interested in alternative ways of registering or measuring the passing of time, that would perhaps make us more aware and in-tune with our bodies in real-time and space. Instead of knowing the time through a set of numbers and ticking seconds, you would know through observation and sensation, becoming a shifting atmospheric encounter. Tim Winton connects to this subjective sense of time in his book *The Turning*, recalling a number on the home phone he could ring as a kid, and the time would be read out:

By this time, I was beginning to have second thoughts about the 1194 man. My parents bought a kitchen clock which seemed to cheat time. A minute was longer some days than others. An hour beyond the fence travelled differently across your skin compared with an hour of television. I felt time turned off. Time wasn't straight. I was right to doubt the 1194-man (...) time doesn't click on and on at the stroke. It comes and goes in waves and folds like water; it flutters and sifts like dust, rises, billows, and falls back on itself. When waves break, the water is not moving. The swell has travelled a great distance but only the energy is moving, not the water. Perhaps time moves through us and not us through it (Winton 43-53)

By taking cues from our surroundings there is a layering of narratives over time, an intersection between how we fill ~a sun-informed day~ and the pace that our surroundings suggest. The landscape and oceans are markers of what's happening, their shadows, tides, smells, heat, movement and behaviour should shape ours, and if we listen and look closely enough, they might be telling us something important about slowing down.

I look towards writers like Winton and time theorists like Van de Berg for their intriguing queries, not resolved answers. Poet, painter, writer and critic John Berger questions what we see and the initial encounter of this moment, and our attempt to describe it in real-time through words. Berger however points out the unfillable gap between the two, how words are not always enough to encompass and define what has happened or happening. Stating that "the relationship between what we see and what we know is never settled" (Berger 7). For me, this gap is filled with feelings. Feelings that occur because of specific moments and encounters that are in themselves very hard to describe.

This is what I'm most often trying to shed light on within my art and writing. If I'm perfectly honest I don't think I'll get there, as I think the only way (certainly in Berger's eyes) would be to go and *see* the South Coast for yourself, and maybe that way you won't be able to unsee it too, "it is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain it with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it (...) We only see what we look at, to look is an act of choice" (Berger 8), this act is continuous and what keeps our lives and thoughts active ~ always holding on ~

Part of my attraction to *time theories* is that I don't really understand, agree or disagree with any. They are almost like an abstract painting, in that they could mean one thing but likely might mean another. But I do understand that time has an indexical relationship to the act of observation, on which my project is based. I want to find a theory about slowing down in a world where productivity comes before most other things.

Philosopher Henri Bergson offers an alternative way of thinking about time, questioning the temporality, affect, agency and embodiment of it in real-time, considering it through a softer, slower and more empathetic lens. At the centre of his philosophical methods were intuition and instinct that were grounded in sentimentality (Guerlac). I wonder about what if we followed this instinct more and questioned the kind of assumptions that find their way into our actions when they relate to more deliberate observation. Can you walk around a body of art and let go of temporal and spatial expectations, or more directly can art ask this of you, can it obscure, suggest and re-direct? It is all a highly subjective process, and considering

Bergson's thinking "we could almost say it is closer to dreaming than to knowing" (Guerlac 01).

The time-based elements of saturation, duration and observation have become more central to my thinking; "Duration becomes the very foundation of our being and the very substance of the things with which we find ourselves in communication with" (Bergson 5).

~*Yesterday's Shadow, 2021*~ and ~*Sun Room, 2021*~ were both installations that explored an earthly vocabulary of materials, looking at how clay, pigment and canvas can form a relationship to time and distance. And in a sense were a homage to Nancy Holt and the Land Art movement.

I dream about seeing Holt's Sun Tunnels. Lying deep in the Utah desert, four large concrete cylinders are placed in a cross formation, perfectly framing the sun of each Summer and Winter solstice. Holt gently re-positions the viewer through the observation of natural phenomena; "viewers don't look at them but through them to discover other realms" (L.Lippard, *Artforum*) a kind of tunnel vision offering the opportunity to challenge the way we engage with landscape.

~Yesterday's Shadow, 2021~



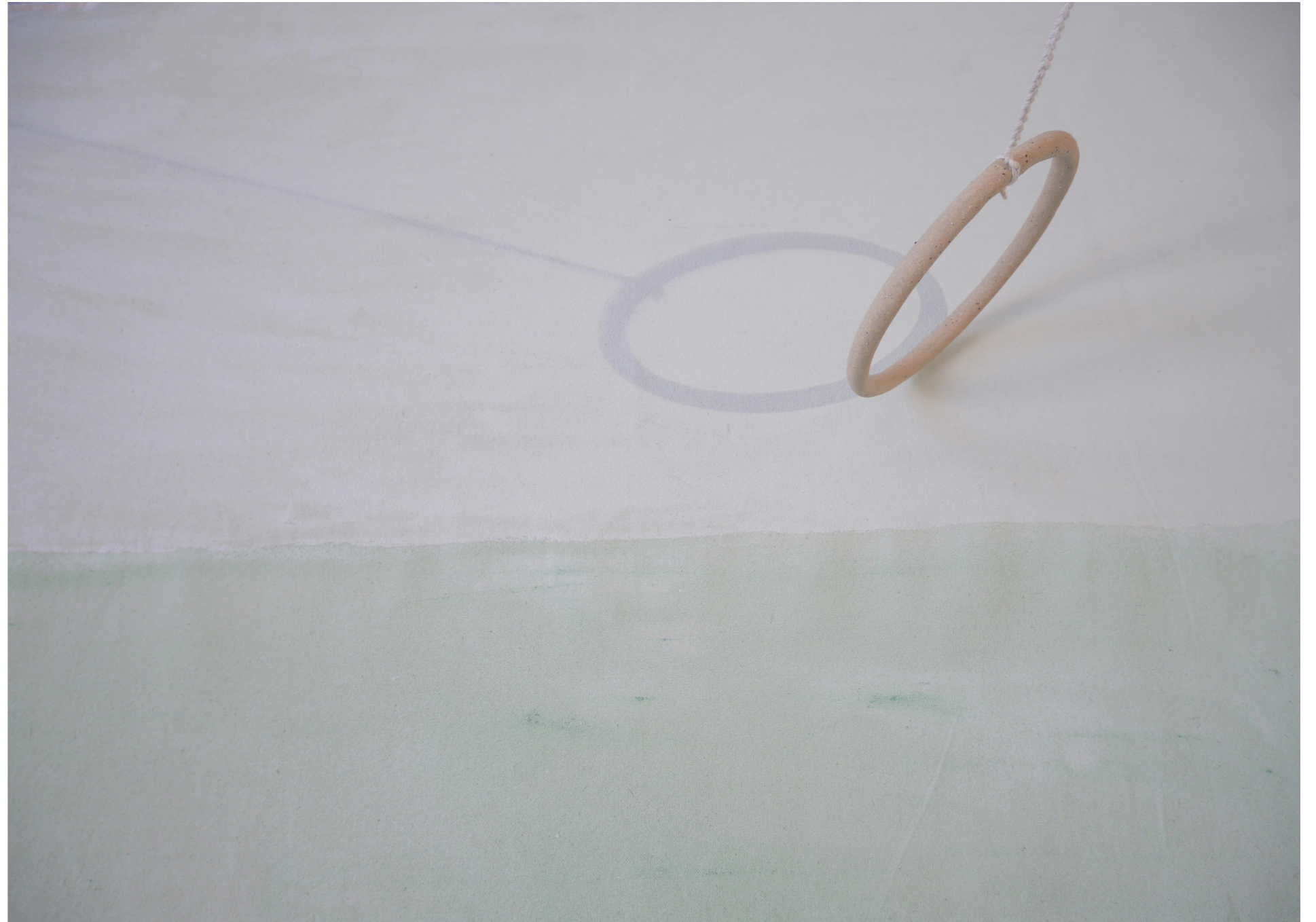
~Yesterday's Shadow ~ an upside-down monochrome rainbow~ investigates Van de Berg's notion of time manifesting itself in every action and motion, along with Holt's idea of natural forms and gravity's influence on them. I had a 20 kg bag of clay, some raw canvas and linen, pink pigment and a cotton sling. I rolled the clay out by hand only stopping once the whole bag was gone, then section by section I moved it into the sling allowing the clay to curve.

I was testing the fabric's ability to support and hold the clay and colour over time and following the materials intuition to stain, strain and saturate. The clay warped and twisted under the pressure of gravity as it was damp and heavy. As the clay dried it became lighter changing the tension of the sling. I wanted to propose through the shifting state of the sculpture different modes of embodiment, space and vision.

The shadow of yesterday cannot exist, it is impossible, but I like the idea of something lingering. I am interested in a shadow not being fixed to one moment, existing with its own agency as a painting within itself. I further explored this idea of shadows through *Sun Room*, 2021 as both a material and spatial investigation of how shadows stretch and curve over the length of a day, a visible mark of where the sun is.

~Sun Room, 2021~

I was considering Holt's concepts of calculated endlessness and earthly observation that are above and beyond it all (Holt, Smithson). I was looking at the spinning shadows reflected around the space by my ceramic hoops and thought about the sun, its pace and movement and their connection to the body and land.



Sun Room, 2021 (Detail)

The process of working with clay engages with repetition, mark-making and form-building. An accumulation of movements and material reactions over time, remaining in the state of becoming. There is a meditative quality when working with clay, as it goes through many unrushed processes that work with the rhythms of the day and the cycle of the sun. Sometimes my clay is left to air dry, other times it is fired, but it is always unglazed as I want to see how it absorbs and reflects the light, allowing all the quiet textures to surface and letting the nature of the clay take precedence over my control or intention.

Both these installations had clay sculptures and painted canvas elements that seemed to sit at odds with each other. I intended them to work together as a sort of metaphorical landscape, but it was possibly too obvious.

I am however interested in the potential value of works that are at odds with each other. To have an element of awkwardness among the more harmonious subtleties of the work, as a way of disrupting and shifting someone's thoughts or experiences around familiar spaces and the concept of time, observation and sunlight.



Sun Room, 2021 (Detail)

~ There's a ghost in the garden ~

The theoretical notion of 'hauntology' sits between what is no longer there and what is yet to happen (Derrida). Philosopher Jacques Derrida coined it as a side-stepping of ontology. What is important here is that it questions time in the sense that it is constantly moving forwards and backwards ~broken time~ (Derrida). That our thoughts and positionality in the world are determined by many factors that are invisible or absent in the sense of linear time, such as a memory or a moment bound to come. That the places we go, the things we choose to observe and notice, the cultures we are from and are around and the people we love are endlessly informing the lens through which we see the world. Writer and music critic Mark Fisher uses this term as a way of looking into the past whilst remaining the present to find hope for what he refers to as our lost or ghost like future (Fisher).

Although Derrida and Fisher are talking about the concept of broken time, hauntology and the spectre within the contexts of experience, memory and time, I see it as a conceptual material that encompasses the range of encounters and circumstances that drive us to think and make, its presence possibly felt in colours, forms and composition.

I have found this concept helpful in developing processes and methods of making and writing that reflect and respond to the changing state of the environment and the everyday. I see it as an exchange of some sort between what catches my eye, my hands, the materials, time and place. Form (spectral and solid) entangled with action, a poetry of gestures and suggestions.

Slowly moving. Drifting. You can only do this accidentally. If you set out to do it deliberately you will always fail. It is only when you remember, only then will you realise that you caught a glimpse (...) when your attention was diverted. Just a hint, a glimmer, a shade. Much later, you will remember. Without really knowing why. Vague peripheral sensations gather. Some fraction of a long rhythm is beginning to be recognised. The hidden frequencies and tides of the city (Fisher 144).

Perhaps something art can do better than words, is to summon or allude to the atmosphere and emotions of a place that deeply affects us, taking into consideration that the materials, content and context are changeable because of the individual viewer.

Fisher asks "what lurks, unquiet, in that space?" (Fisher 112) For me, this would mean the 'ghosts' of every viewer, myself and the past ~object and us~. I want to convey a message of urgency but not at the loss of the other things that are not necessarily integral to the work in terms of the viewer, but they are important to me and how I got here.

~ The Sun Rises in Italy ~

~ One of my 'vague peripheral' influences ~



Claudia Morris, *Painted Walls of Italy*, 2022

This is part of the symmetry I mentioned before, we circle around each other, remaining close even when we are far apart. As the sun sets on me it rises on her, around and around we go. She smells like yellow sun-backed earth and is now living through one of Italy's hottest summers on record.

I have an identical twin. Her name is Claudia May Morris. She is 3 cm taller than me and has just moved to Italy. She sends me photos of the pavements and buildings of the new cities she is walking through, of the repaired patches on walls that cover holes and graffiti. She is a painter too. These repairs are often painted one or two shades off from the original colour.

These painted patches are for practical reasons, but for us, they are accidental everyday paintings. They are pink monochromes that depict the history of and love for the buildings. In a sense, an act of trying to keep something the same. I'm interested in the gap between the colours, walls, buildings, space and Claudia, and the attempt to cover it up. These pink street paintings in conjunction with the warm grey pavement are mundanely beautiful.

In this sense, Claudia is seamlessly a part of my art practice because she is my every day ~ as spectral as that may be.



This is Claudia drawing on a notepad in a dirty skate park in Rome. She drew a blue monkey mouse that almost looked happy.



Claudia Morris, *Monkey Mouse*, 2022

We talk of blues and greens, and pinks and reds because it is romantic. She misses home and I miss her. She is my *Faraway Sun*, and so is Italy.

A while back she sent an image of a cane basket holding an olive branch, it filled my heart with an odd sense of hope, it almost felt religious (but it was not).

~Faraway Sun, 2022 ~



Hanging centrally in this installation are olive branch clippings from the coast cradled in a ceramic gathering vessel suspended and *held* at eye level. The outermost twigs of olive trees need to be pruned back to allow the sunlight to reach the centre so it can continue to grow. Olive trees are resilient by nature, withstanding intense heat and storms and are the international peace sign. I think the sentiment of it is meaningful and important in terms of an offering or a metaphor to understand our connection to the land and hope, and to recognise a type of commitment that we need to make.

As the branches dry, leaves fall landing on the yellow painting below, small rhythmic cycles like this controlled how the piece was viewed. There is a sinking and rising feeling that ripples through the installation, *what will stay and what will leave, slipping beneath the rising seas?*

My intention was to bring the colour off the wall and project it around the space using translucent fabrics as a development from *Sand Blows Through My Bedroom Window*, as a way of exploring colours' shifting relationship to space. It is a similar green to the previous installation, but I was testing how it could connect more directly to the ever-changing light quality and transparency of the ocean and sea mists that effect the South Coast. Rather than feeling as if it was an empty swimming pool I wanted to communicate the feeling of being drowned, immersed or over saturated in colour.

At Twenty-Six Constable Street windows run the length of the gallery, letting all day sun in. As you walk through the door you are met by a shifting wall of translucent sea green monochrome paintings. The intensity of green changes depending on where you stand, from some angles you are peering through four paintings at once, from others it is hardly noticeable as the bright light filters through. The paintings are paired together with silk, muslin and sheer cotton, stitched together to form a horizon line, layered and obscured, they hang vertically through the space with paced out gaps between them forming small spaces to move and pause in.

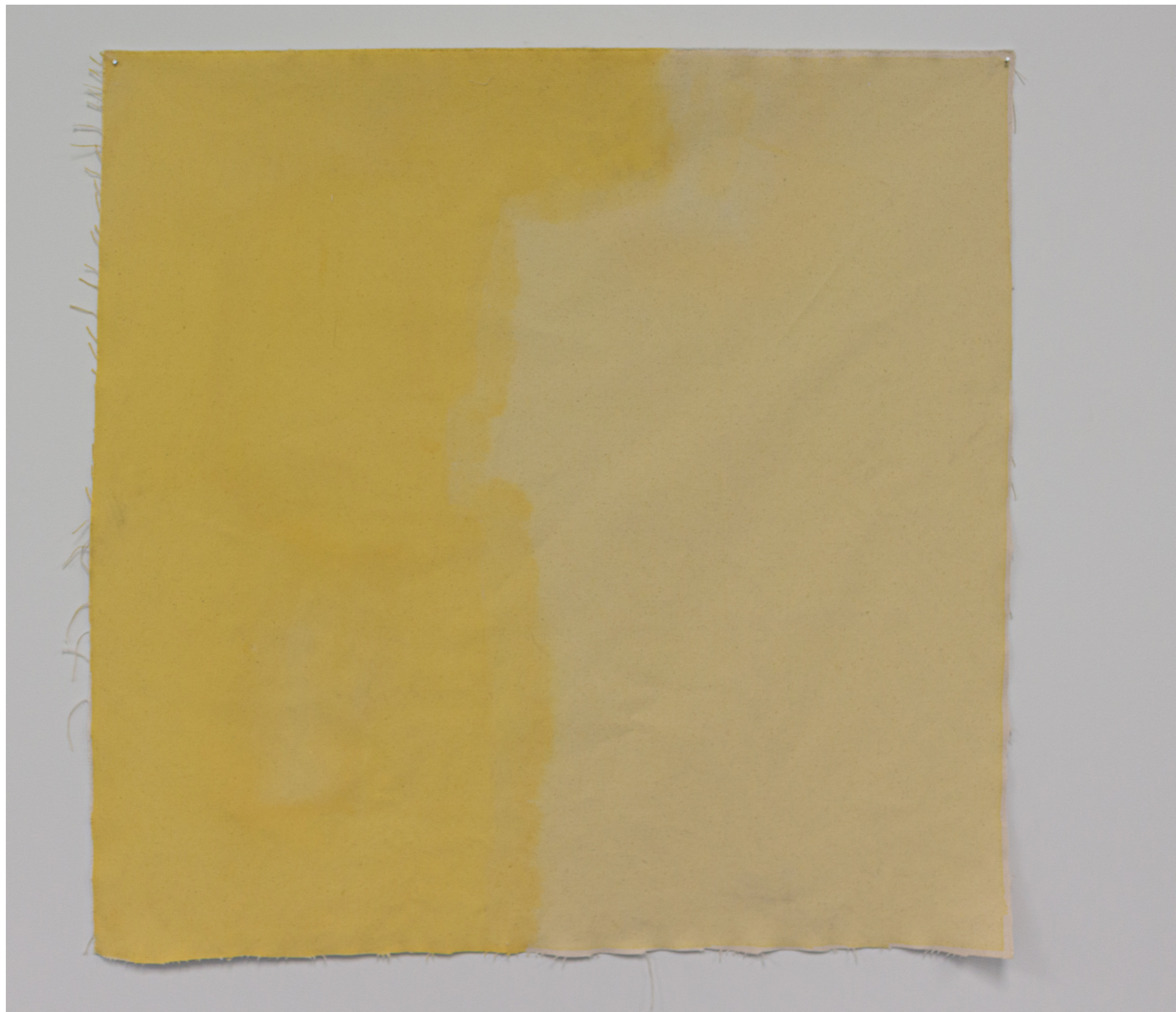
They are positioned to softly frame two paintings on canvas, one in Naples yellow and the other in ochre. One hung on the back wall, the other lying flat on the ground. Naples yellow is one of the oldest pigments dating back to early cave paintings when humans first learnt to mark-make, to capture a gesture in time through colour. It was used in the Renaissance to depict the glow of a faraway sun, while ochre was used to depict the warmth of the sun on skin. I am interested in how these colours were used to show the physical effects of the sun. The long-lasting trace of the sun, warmth and the connectedness of places near and far, as artist Sonia Delaunay states; "colour is where the very ancient and distant future meet" (Delaunay 4). Colour is a bridge and pathway for thought.

There are multiple anchors and thoughts in one space. It is a following of the nose, heart and memory, a devoted moment between spaces and the passing of time. I wanted this piece to have an openness and looseness to it through the use of materials and meanings that were tied to the objects. But there was a disconnect that echoed through the work: the vertical nature of the painting didn't encompass the room or viewer, there were too many multiple entry and exist points. I am interested in what narrowing this down would feel like, to be more directive in how I want people to experience the work and space. Would this make an installation more unified?



Faraway Sun, 2022 (Detail)

This is when I started thinking about birds' nests and more specifically Albatross nests. Nests are small spaces within in a large space, a careful combining of materials and actions to build a home, a safe place that often has one way in and one way out. I have learnt through the installations that it is not enough to just suggest a new space in an already established space through colour alone, it needs to be altered or rebuilt in a sense. A separation or clear divide is needed.



Faraway Sun, 2022 (Detail)

~Albatross Nest, 2022~



The Wandering Albatross flies only as far North as the coast of Pōneke. They are nomads of the sea. In sailor's tales, they are both a blessing and curse because they don't often mean that land is near. They can fly for days without moving their wings and go years without touching land. The species are 32 million years old. They spend two years building a nest and will return to it year and year again. They are close observers of the coastline, looking for a space between the land, rocks and sea that will offer them shelter, offer them a home.

Albatross for me represent a gentle way of life, moving with wind and sea currents for as long as it takes to get to where they need to be. A long-lasting moment. I think the Albatross's way of life offers a complex yet subtle insight into ways of forming a relationship with the coast.

My partner Zac and I have been talking about boats. About building a boat, sailing a boat and living on a boat. One time the sun was sitting low over the hills of Aotea Island, around the headland came a sailboat like a wandering albatross, bodies jumped overboard with boards. They paddled over and surfed like dancing shadows. They were gone by morning light.



Albatross Nest, 2022 (Detail)



Albatross Nest, 2022 (Detail)

For this installation *Albatross Nest, 2022* I wanted to draw attention to my immediate surrounds and thoughts by creating new temporal walls or alternative walls that gestured to places beyond the walls of the test / gallery space ~ a floating space within a space~. I was also thinking about what it means to build or construct a space with the intention of totally encompassing the viewer.

Tracing paper painted Naples yellow wraps around the room, hanging flush with the ceiling it drops down, almost meeting the floor. It surrounds you completely ~ a warm nest~.

Unlike *Faraway Sun* and *I Heard the Sun Dancing* you cannot see through the paintings, even though there are windows behind the work. An even, dull but bright light is cast upon the room, flattening everything in the space into a soft outline, until you get close, stand still and adjust. Forms shift depending on your attention. The painted yellow brush strokes differ from piece to piece, the visual impression changes depending on your position in the room, the light and weather conditions outside. Moving around the room the surfaces shift, through washed-out areas and dry brush strokes that become visible.

There are small stacks of clay tiles placed in the shadow line of the hanging painting, some out of reach in the space between the wall and the work that you cannot get to. They are offerings of clay and colour in the form of a painting (?) that is made for the ground. They are to be walked around and next to but not walked over. I put a question mark next to painting because I am almost sure they are, but not convinced that they must be.

In the right-hand corner where the paper bends around the parameters of the room, there is a mobile bell hanging. It consists of four small bells and two rods. The chimes softly ring and clink as they spin around. This bell is less static than others previously, it is more open to movement as it relies on balance, gravity and weight. It is an accumulation of many parts that move if you do. There is a bell that hangs behind the painting, the silhouette of it just noticeable. But if you walk close enough to make the painting billow you can hear it ring.

I can imagine albatrosses using bells in another world, ringing them far out at sea, knowing where land is but not seeing it.



Albatross Nest, 2022 (Detail)

Albatross Nest is a gathering and collection of colour, objects and sounds. It is one whole piece that I think is more successful than other installations discussed as the space feels unified. Through tonal and material qualities of the painting and sculptures working together to communicate a message of resting and peace, but also of threat. It is fragile, easily broken and threatened ~ both bird, art and us. Working with paper instead of fabric was important because of its ephemeral nature. I see paper as an active thinking material, for planning, holding, mapping and processing.

I was investigating the tension and uneasiness when things are in a fragile state. If you did not notice the tile paintings and stood back, they would crumple. If you ring the bells too loud, they will shatter. If you rush past the paper it will tear. Fragile things require careful attention and energy.

~Ruminare~

To focus on the sun and colours for me is to notice the beauty in life. The potential held in the wings of an Albatross and the clippings of an olive tree. It is to notice again and again, as painter Agnes Martin believes: “beauty is very much broader than just to the eye. It is our whole, positive response to life” (Martin 4). This means constantly and actively searching for ways forward. To *ruminate* and to create a generative space for the future. To live amongst fear, love and optimism within and around the great white sharks and more importantly neighbors like Ken. Both are scary but one carries a far more threatening lesson than the other.

My Great Granddad grew up in Island Bay and was an ocean swimmer. The bay is deep, deeper than you think and deeper than you can possibly see. It's cold, maybe the coldest on the coast. Currents drifting straight up from Antarctica. There's a story about a giant octopus and my Great Granddad. As much as this is a fact in our family, it is also a myth. I am uncertainly certain about it.

They said it had huge tentacles stretching meters and meters long, moving underwater at great speed without causing a ripple on the surface. They love deep water. There used to be a diving platform built out in the bay between the beach and the island, you could climb up and dive deep down, it's good for your breathing, especially in cold water. They say he dove off and didn't come back up. He was wrestling with the octopus trying to free himself.

I used to do ocean swimming with my dad and sister. We would swim out to the island together. In a row. I would always think of this story standing on the shoreline, you don't want bad luck at sea. I'd wear goggles. They would fog up almost straight away, I liked this. It meant I couldn't see anything but blurry colours. I didn't want to look but I didn't want to not look. The swim would start a clear green then turn to dark blue then black green. The black green is where I pictured the octopus. I'd look to my side to see arms splashing through the surface, one after the other. A continuous loop, a motion, the action of moving forwards and then back again. I was always surprised once I took my goggles off, by how bright it was. I remember this brightness.

I'm scared of octopuses. I'm scared of sea level rises and people overfishing. I'm scared of not being able to run around the coast, I'm scared of my left knee more specifically. I'm scared someone won't love the coast. I'm scared I might die in the ocean one day.

I'm scared of making ugly art. I'm scared of loud art that rocks you because maybe mine doesn't. I'm scared of art that is self-centred. I'm scared of art that calls people out. I'm scared my art is too romantic.

But thinking about it now, I like the uncertainty of octopuses in deep water, the same way I like paintings placed on the floor. I like that we can choose what to notice, and how to remember. I like the certainty of uncertainty, the modernist and the daydreamer.



~ A setting sun. The tide is up ~



The installations discussed above are all iterations of ideas that engage with the realities of climate change as considered through a visual language of colour, material, place, time and sunlight.

It is an *ode* to the porous boundaries of abstract painting and everyday life that slip in and out of focus throughout my practice and writing, for me there is no separation between where one starts and the other ends, it is an entanglement of the mundane and the powerful.

It is an *ode* to the duration of time, the materialisation of time, our use of time, and our perceptions and observations of time that are becoming so significant in a world where we are quickly running out of *it*. Slow is the opposite of fast, so however gentle it might feel it is an act of resistance and hope.



I Heard the Sun Dancing, 2022 (Stills from video documentation)



Albatross Nest, 2022 (Detail)

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List of installations discussed in the text in chronological order of making:

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Sun Room, 2021

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*I've been thinking about the sun lately:
A painterly exploration of place, time and ecology.*

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