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An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Massey University,

Wellington, New Zealand

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To Raymond, Tamatha and Ming.

Through our collaborations, relationships, and friendships I have grown as a photographer and collaborator. It is with a deep sense of gratitude that I reflect on the privilege of being part of your lives.

Thank You.



Figure 1: *MATAKITE 4* by Russell Kleyn and Raymond McMahon, 2021.



Figure 2: *Tamatha* by Russell Kleyn and Tamatha Paul, 2022.



Figure 3: *Ming at work*, by Russell Kleyn and Ming Ranginui, 2023.

## ABSTRACT

This exegesis critically examines the social, cultural, and political implications of my photographic portraiture practice and artistic development during my MFA study. It focuses on ongoing collaborations with Raymond McMahon, Tamatha Paul, and Ming Ranginui, exploring how these relationships have influenced my practice. I am driven by a commitment to engage with individuals, their environments, and communities in a human-to-human manner, seeking to better understand their experiences and, in turn, my own.

Multiple dynamics will be analysed to support a discourse centring around empathetic modes of photography, collaboration, representation, and storytelling. I also investigate how these relationships and my photographic process actively engage with the wider community.

I engage in self-reflection, delving into the complexities of connecting with my collaborators and understanding their realities. An important aspect of this exploration is recognising the significance of being invited into someone's life and the weight of responsibility that comes with portraying their reality in the works I create through maintaining their dignity throughout this process of exposure.

I examine artists and movements with relevance to my practice, specifically including artists who emphasise the role of better collaborative and portraiture practices.

The portrait is the only form of depiction based on the equality of subject and object: sitters and photographers have to make a commitment to the situation as human beings. If they do not, the picture becomes an illustration of an imagined relationship of power. To my mind, a compelling portrait depends on the mutual readiness to acknowledge personal vulnerability and weakness.

- Wolfgang Tillmans<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tillmans, Wolfgang. *Portraits: Wolfgang Tillmans*. 2nd ed. Distributed Art Publishers, 2002.

## PARALLELS

My adult life has been defined by a series of constant changes. I grew up in a segregated South African suburbia during apartheid, and after university, I found myself in a multicultural South Africa, where unity prevailed despite new challenges like affirmative action. It was a tricky time entering the job market as young white male adult. <sup>2</sup>

Change came again in 2010 when I relocated from London to Aotearoa with my partner, Jan, and our daughter, Hana, who are Ngāi Tahu and Pākehā. This journey has sometimes left us grappling with our identities as we navigate Aotearoa's intricate political landscape. I strive to be a role model for my daughter on her journey to deepen her connection to her whakapapa, I wonder about the best way to lead by example. Amidst this ever-evolving political and cultural context, I have chosen to focus on long-term portrait projects .

While I come from a commercial photography background, I have felt increasingly uncomfortable with the power that comes with being 'the photographer'. When a photographer points a camera at someone, a power shift occurs as the photographer takes a dominant role. Photography can potentially objectify its subjects. More recently, I have actively worked to challenge this power dynamic by engaging in collaboration and working alongside people, with a stronger emphasis on their unique experiences and perspectives.

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<sup>2</sup> "Basic Guide to Affirmative Action," Western Cape Government, n.d., <https://www.westerncape.gov.za/general-publication/basic-guide-affirmative-action>.

## CONVERSATION

Raymond is a well-known figure in Newtown, Wellington. He is a visible part of the diverse local community make-up. He is affectionally know as 'Ninja'. I had seen him around the neighbourhood for over ten years before finally working up the courage to say hello to him in March 2021.

I would find out over time that Raymond is a devout Christian who loved Grandmaster Flash and spending time in nature, that he saw special meanings in the outfits he wore and the experiences he had each day, and that despite the trauma in his earlier life, he was a warm and generous person.

Raymond exhibits his craft on a daily basis whenever he steps out of his apartment onto the Newtown streets. Raymond does a lot of thrifting at the Newtown op-shops. He customises his outfits that he has carefully chosen to make them his own. They are always surprising and original. If he finds a pair of sunglasses he likes, he will cut them down to a profile to suit his style. All these elements he puts together form his craft. I think that he is a walking artwork. One day he may be dressed all in black shielding himself from bad energy, while on another day he may be dressed all in white when he is feeling close to his faith.

Everyday conversation with Raymond, usually over breakfast or sitting on the bench in the sun on the corner of Constable Street, Newtown, activates our creative process. We talk about all kinds of things from work to religion to art, and sometimes we just talk about nonsensical stuff just for a laugh. On occasion Raymond also reveals more personal details from his childhood and relationships with his family. It is during these conversations that creative ideas are sparked, and we conceive ideas for portrait photographs. I print out all the portraits we create and bring them along to our breakfast meet ups. We discuss which photos I like and which ones Raymond likes. Throughout Raymond has edited, censored and added to the writing. This process of talking and making has allowed creative collaboration to turn into a friendship.



Figure 4: *MATAKITE 5* by Russell Kleyn & Raymond McMahon, 2022.

*MATAKITE 5* (fig:4) We decided the day before that we would head to the forest behind the Truby King House in Melrose to make this portrait. When Raymond was younger and fitter, he said, he used to run up the hill and spend time here. Raymond mentions that he gets his staunch stance from growing up on the streets of Whakatāne. The morning light falling between the trees in the forest catching Raymond's wraparound sunglasses allowed for a dramatic studio like lighting effect.

For *MATAKITE 1* (fig:5) we aimed to create a portrait of Raymond with his iconic 10-speed bicycle. He envisioned appearing mysteriously from a puff of smoke in an alley, like in a movie. Raymond mentions that he has adopted brighter clothing colours in an effort to make himself look 'more friendly' He turned up in a green Aztec inspired shirt he discovered in Tākaka, Golden Bay, a town he visits every summer on community missions with his church. The windy conditions that day scattered the smoke, so to compensate, I used red-filtered flash to emphasize his bicycle's red colour and heighten the ordinary. I also blend natural and artificial light to add a layer of mediation or curiosity. The result, though different from our original concept, took on a humorous and original life of its own.



Figure 5: *MATAKITE 1* by Russell Kleyn & Raymond McMahon, 2022.




Figure 6: *MATAKITE 2* by Russell Kleyn & Raymond McMahon, 2022.

*MATAKITE 2* (fig:6) emerged from a mistake. Raymond wanted to be photographed near a Chinese sculpture at the top of Cuba St, but it turned out the sculpture had been removed some time ago to make way for the freeway entrance to the Terrace Tunnel. We photographed the portrait where he recalled the sculpture being anyway. The carpark benefitted from beautiful natural light, making additional lighting unnecessary. Raymond's eyes are visible here as he wasn't wearing sunglasses, a rare treat. Even though other portraits made at this location might be more sensational, this portrait is special.

There is a comparison to be drawn between the divergent working styles of fellow South African artists Pieter Hugo and Mikhael Subotzky.

Subotzky's work seems firmly rooted in the decolonisation journey. His long form project *Umjiegwana* and particularly his ongoing work with ex-prisoner and construction worker Hermarnus Van Wyk (fig: 7) is a collaboration which has to date spanned more than 15 years, during which time they have spoken frequently and at length. This is an example of Subotzky's commitment to establishing strong relationships with the people he collaborates with. Subotzky's support of fellow black South African photographers and participation in Johannesburg's Umhlathi Collective further illustrate his commitment to community and nation building principles.<sup>3 4</sup>

Figure 7: Mikhael Subotzky - Instagram post, March 2022.

Subotzky seems to be pursuing a trajectory leading towards possibly abandoning the camera entirely, with a firm knowledge that the camera is a colonial capturing device. His creative practice now includes painting, collage, and video animation as additional means of making his artworks.<sup>5 6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Subotzky, Mikhael. "Umjiegwana Works / MIKHAEL SUBOTZKY ARCHIVE," n.d. <https://www.subotzkystudio.com/works/umjiegwana-works/>.

<sup>4</sup> Umhlabathi Collective. "Instagram," n.d. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CwkrQ89NWfw/>.

<sup>5</sup> Subotzky, Mikhael. "Goodman Gallery," 2019. <https://www.goodman-gallery.com/exhibitions/1059>.

<sup>6</sup> Subotzky, Mikhael. "Epilogue - Goodman Gallery London - Viewing Room - Goodman Gallery Viewing Rooms," n.d. <https://goodman-viewingroom.exhibit-e.art/viewing-room/mikhael-subotzky-epilogue#tab:slideshow;tab-1:thumbnails>.

Dissimilar to Subotzky, Pieter Hugo appears to be picking up considerable commercial and fashion photography work, his interest in the exotic having caught the eye of the exclusive brands, who are always on the hunt for something new.<sup>7</sup>

In one of his most recent commercial commissions, Hugo took American rapper Travis Scott to northern Nigeria in July 2023 to photograph him for the cover of his new album *Utopia* and revisited the hyena men that he first photographed twenty years earlier in 2003 to make new portraits to be included in a zine to support the release of the album.<sup>8</sup>

I note these observations as a cautionary tale to myself. There is little information provided by Hugo on the northern Nigerian Hyena men themselves, no names, or information. In my mind this feels exploitative. He has revisited the people who have given so much to his career to give them, and their mana, away to a commercial application, whereby humans are profited from, rather than engaged with.

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<sup>7</sup> Hugo, Pieter. "Instagram," n.d., <https://www.instagram.com/p/CqShZOfNXCc/>.

<sup>8</sup> Hugo, Pieter. "Instagram," n.d., <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cwmr7AHtCsC/>.

Conversations with photographic printer Peter Miles inspired me to shift from non-reflective photo printing to experimenting with high-gloss photo paper and aluminium dye sublimation. The photos I produced respond to reflected light and the viewer's movement. High gloss images reflect the viewer's form, emphasizing their role in engaging with the creative process and interacting with Raymond.



Figure 8: *Matakite* Dye sublimation experiments onto aluminium. Light activates the portrait, 2023.

2023 began with an exhibition of the *Matakite* work at Twentysix Gallery (Newtown) in March. The opportunity enabled the editing process.<sup>9</sup>

We experimented with installation ideas. I arranged with the Wellington City Council to relocate a public bench from the sidewalk into the gallery space. (fig: 10 and 11) The bench served both as a found sculpture and as a seating area for visitors to view the artworks and read an essay I had written.



Figure 9: Matakite, TwentySix Gallery, exterior gallery view, 2023.

The semi-translucent gold foil applied to the gallery windows created unique warm filtered lighting (fig:9 and fig:10) within the gallery, casting a reflective golden glow onto the sidewalk

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<sup>9</sup> "MATAKITE - Twentysix Gallery, n.d., <https://twentysix.co.nz/matakite>.

outside, accentuating the reflective nature of our photographic works. The idea originated from Raymond who makes the same use of the gold foil on his own apartment windows.

Passers-by stopped to take selfies in the 'golden mirror' of the gallery windows during the exhibition. Raymond had often mentioned encountering people who tested or provoked him on the street due to his appearance, so in addition, the foil safety blanket served the dual purpose of wrapping the gallery in a protective layer. The golden foil was also reminiscent of the surface of Raymond's wrap-around sunglasses.

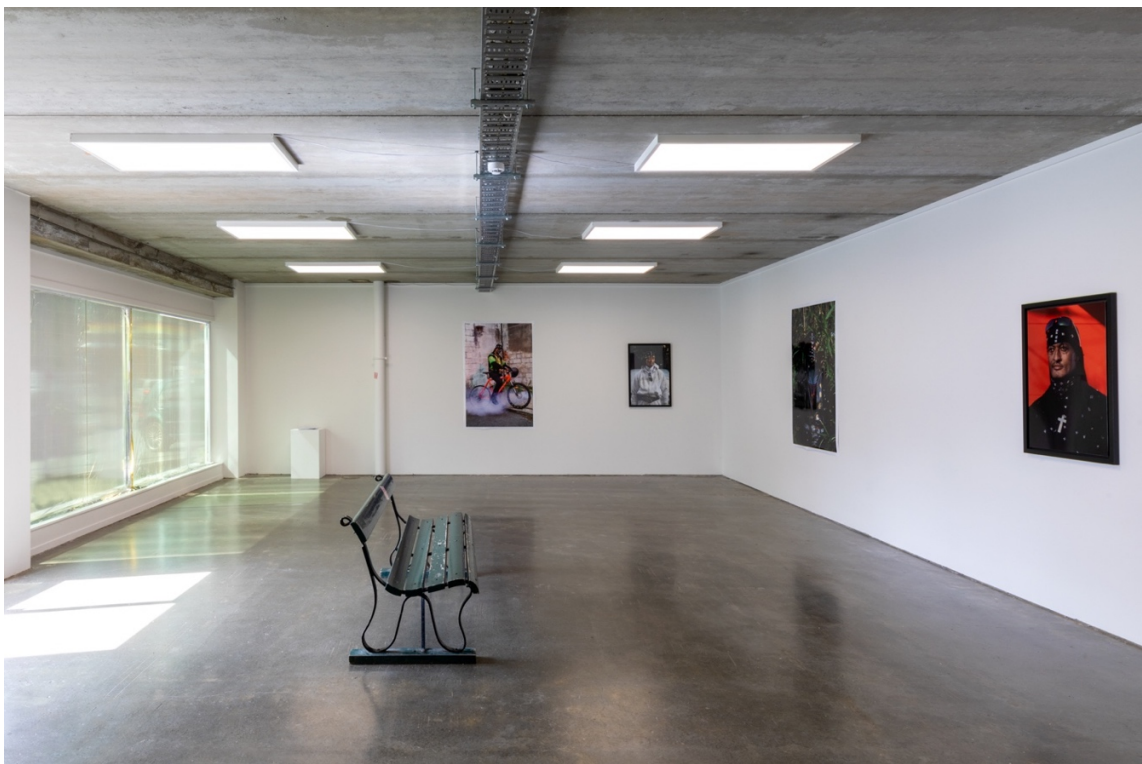
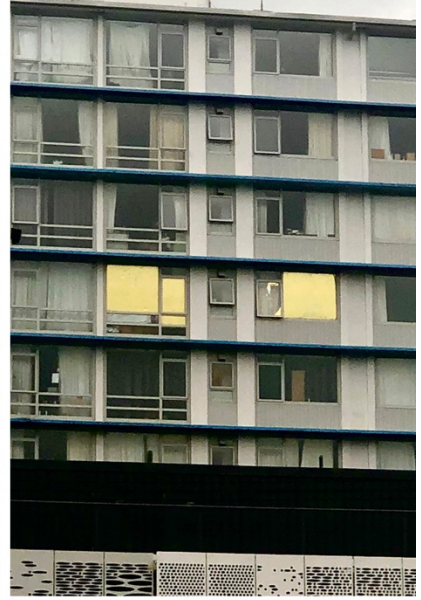


Figure 10: *Matakite*, installation view, TwentySix Gallery, 2023



Figure 11: *Matakite*, installation view, TwentySix Gallery, 2023.

The public response was encouraging. Many visitors expressed that they knew Raymond from Newtown but were unaware of his life and left with newfound respect. This was also a chance to connect with more of Raymond's friends, church community and Newtown locals. I didn't anticipate the emotional toll of participating in Raymond's story over the 10-day exhibition. It took a lot out of me.



## TRUST

I met politician and activist Tamatha Paul in July 2021. I was commissioned by *Frankie Magazine* in Australia to photograph a portrait of Tamatha for an editorial feature. We talked that day about sailing and weathering storms. We also discussed South Africa, and Stellenbosch, a town around 45mins drive from Cape Town, where I studied Graphic Design in the 90's. It turns out Tamatha had been to South Africa and Stellenbosch on a university exchange in 2020.

Tamatha asked me if I was interested photographing her for her upcoming city council election campaign running the next year. We chose the framework of me following her campaign trail as a way for me to create more personal portraits but also for Tamatha to create commercial portrait photographs that are empowering and allow for her to execute her campaign communications effectively.

I photographed a few of Tamatha's campaign events and meetings. It is a process of making photographs and reviewing the outcomes. I created a working document to develop a collaborative framework and sketch out some scenarios to try to create some more certainty on possible portraits that I might be happy with.

When pitching these pre-planned ideas to Tamatha, she quickly shut them down and stated that she was interested in us travelling to Dunedin to photograph her with her grandfather. She mentioned that he was the most important person in her life and the person that she looks to for guidance with her career and life choices.

This was a significant point in the conversation with Tamatha. This brought a life and new level of trust into the work, and I became excited thinking towards the potential next steps.



Figure 12: *Tamatha, The Oaks* by Russell Kleyn and Tamatha Paul, 2022.

One evening I met Tamatha at The Oaks Satay Noodle House on Cuba Mall after work. We had been talking about Tamatha possibly running for MP for the Green Party in 2023. We were fooling around, and I asked her how she might sit behind her office desk in parliament one day.

After the meal I asked Tamatha if she would recreate the pose and we made this portrait. (fig:12) It is a spontaneous portrait, with no tripod or additional lighting. There is some formal staging, although the portrait is more symbolic of the conversation we had just had. This portrait has taken on a new importance to me with Tamatha's recent election as MP for Wellington Central.

“Hard to gain, easy to destroy, and tough to repair once broken. But it is also one of the few forces that can hold a community together. Unlike love or power, trust cannot be bought - it must be earned.”<sup>10</sup>

Dunedin was a real eye-opener for me. I arrived with preconceived ideas about locations and how I wanted to position Tamatha and her Granddad in the portraits. These ideas soon went out the window with the direction on the day being firmly directed by Tamatha’s granddad Shane. We ended up driving around Dunedin for the most part of a day with the portraits all photographed in places that had personal significance to him. The portrait photograph below (fig:13) was made at the end of this day outside Tamatha’s grandparents’ state house in St Clair, Dunedin



Figure 13: *Tamatha, Shane & Carol* by Russell Kleyn & Tamatha Paul, 2022.

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<sup>10</sup> Warner, Marigold. “Trust.” *British Journal of Photography*, no. 7907 (March 2022). pp. 62 – 66

While I was walking with Shane in the Dunedin botanical gardens, he showed me a photo on his mobile phone. (fig: 14) It has a dark background and is of a polar bear and a doll. Shane tells me that Tamatha collaborated on the painting with him. We agree to talk about the painting in further detail after I have returned to Wellington in a video interview.



Figure 14: *Untitled* by Tamatha Paul & Shane Griffiths, 2017 - 2021.

The outcome from the trip to Dunedin feels like the successful culmination of three months of conversations and relationship building with Tamatha. It feels as if I am now at a starting point to move forward. That I have a platform to build on.

Showing the portrait of Tamatha and her grandparents (fig:13) to Fiona Clark the following month, she responded to the work with; “I can see that you have done the work in the relationship and that Tamatha understands that.” “There may be bumps in the road in the relationship but that I need to be confident that I have done the groundwork.”

Fiona goes on to say that this portrait is “strong enough to show on its own.”

This brought me to consider whether the work we produce needs to be shown in a characteristic gallery space? “artists using social situations to produce dematerialised, anti-market, politically engaged projects that carry on the modernist call to blur art and life.” What now? How do the public get to view the work? Is this even important? <sup>11</sup>

Tamatha takes strict control of the way that she is represented in the photographs that we create and there is a firm focus on creating portraits that will work well for her campaign or press photography. The nature of our collaboration can be restrictive, limiting spontaneous creativity.

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<sup>11</sup> Bishop, Claire. “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents.” *ARTFORUM*, February 2006.

I viewed the work of Louisa Afoa (fig: 15) and Edith Amituanai (fig: 16) as part of the exhibition *Perilous: Unheard Stories from the Collection* at Te Puna o Waiwhetū Christchurch Art Gallery. Both artists have some connection to the public vs private along with a domestic ‘do it yourself’ aesthetic that I identify with.



Figure 15: Louisa Afoa, *Blue Clam*, 2018. 

Figure 16: Edith Amituanai, *Hendo*, 2011. 

Melanie Oliver: There are some consistent narratives or areas of interest in your practice, in particular a focus on communities and giving agency to your subjects. When starting a new body of work, what inspires you or how do you approach this?

Edith Amituanai: I think I am consistently drawn to the unseen, overlooked and misunderstood, whether that is done in public or private, from living rooms to parks. In particular, things that we might think we know, have read about but lack a kind of clear visual language in our minds. That might mean making photographs of young people hanging out in public spaces, in front of train stations and shops on the suburban streets of Auckland. Or it could mean photographing living rooms with a kind of Pacific migrant aesthetic or loud siren speakers stacked on top of cars. My aim is not really about agency – that might imply that I do not benefit from the relationship which is not true – but I do think about the duty of care once I decide to focus on something. Mostly I think it starts with asking, what do I want to focus on and how can I take care of that and at the same time push past what’s easy? <sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna O Waiwhetū. “New Photographs in the Collection,” n.d. <https://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/bulletin/209/new-photographs-in-the-collection>.

Deanna Templeton excels at putting her collaborators at ease in front of the camera, creating an intimate viewer perspective. I've incorporated this technique in some of my portraits of Tamatha. Additionally, favouring the landscape format differentiates my photos of Tamatha from my previous work with Raymond, which followed the traditional vertical portrait format. (fig:17 and fig:18)

Figure 17: [Deanna Templeton, Untitled, What She Said book, 2021.](#)

Figure 18: [Deanna Templeton, studio view, during What She Said book production, 2021.](#)



Figure 19: *Tamatha* by Russell Kleyn & Tamatha Paul, 2022.

The above portrait of Tamatha (fig:19) shows the horizontal portrait in application. This was photographed on lower Taranaki Street after a campaign meeting. The lighting is natural sunlight reflected off an adjacent building. The image applies a studio lighting approach to a situation using only available light.

In early 2023 Tamatha and I worked on concepts for her Green Party campaign photography while I simultaneously worked with Raymond on brainstorming the installation of the *Matakite* exhibition. Managing overlapping projects alongside my commercial practice involved a massive workload and tested my stamina.

We produced strong campaign photos that lent Tamatha an edge over her rivals. It became evident that Tamatha's busy schedule, juggling the campaign and her responsibilities with the Wellington City Council, would leave her with little time. We agreed to reconvene in 2024.



Figure 20: Tamatha Paul’s Green Campaign posters located throughout Wellington, 2023.




Figure 21: Tamatha and Raymond outside the Matakite Exhibition, March 2023. <sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Paul, Tamatha. "Instagram: MATAKITE," March 16, 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CpzR2a8tuCS/>.



## FOLLOW THE SIGNS

I first saw Ming Ranginui's work at the 2020 Exposure exhibition at Massey University. It was a sculptural work of a singular front car seat covered in pink satin fabric smocked to form the shape of a heart on the backrest of the chair. (fig 22) I remember circling the chair a few times and feeling very impressed by the work and level of humour and skill involved. A seat adorned with satin lining, perhaps too decorative for practical use?

Figure 22: *baby on board*, by Ming Ranginui, 2020. 

We subsequently both had our work published in the same issue of *Lodown Magazine* called "*Vehiculo*", a Berlin based art magazine themed around global car culture. I was documenting burnout subcultures in Aotearoa. I had the chance to meet Ming and her partner Aidan.

I think of Ming as a free spirit and a provocateur. We have good laughs, get along well, and are at our happiest when we are hanging out just talking nonsense. Our plan is to record the lives of Ming and Aidan at home being themselves was a way for us to get to know each other better. We will then start to weave into the narrative some side stories that relate closer to Ming's art practice and her way of thinking.<sup>14</sup>

I have visited and photographed Ming and Aidan at home, in their home on the street where her nan was raised, and more recently in their new home a kilometre or so away. They currently rent their house from a landlord and aspire to get onto the property ladder. Security is very important to Ming. She mentions that she is ready for Aidan to pop the question.

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<sup>14</sup> Together these narratives form a variation of speculative documentary that embodies a polycentric approach.



Figure 23: *Ming and Aidan* by Russell Kleyn and Ming Ranginui, 2023.

One day driving around Titahi Bay, Ming asks me if I believe in curses and talks a lot about superstitions. We talk about cats and dogs and a particular superstition that if a cat sits on your head or rubs its head against yours, it believes that it owns you. Ming tells me that she bought the red car for Aidan as a present. I am really enjoying working with Ming, she often uses the words chaos and cosmic which I think sums up the early part of working together.

On one return visit I photographed Ming and Aidan together with their car, a red Subaru Impreza on the coast at Whitireia Park. (fig: 23) I scouted this location prior to making the photograph. I used a studio flash in addition to the natural light, blending the two at similar exposures. The flash allows me to heighten the ordinary, tightening up the aperture allowing for more detail. They are together as individuals.

It was really great to meet Edith Amituanai in person as part of the 2023 Peter Turner events. Edith's *Epifania* created in 2022, explores her relationship with her friend Epi. Since it's a recent work, no existing literature is available. I reached out to Edith for an interview that pertains to *Epifania* and my own practice. Her candid responses underscore the significance of timing, enthusiasm, and learning from admired individuals<sup>15 16</sup>

*Epifania* allowed Edith to effectively insert herself into the narrative. In my mind Edith emphasizes the importance of understanding power dynamics and positioning oneself alongside a collaborator. Conversation is revealed as a mechanism of support and equitability.

It is interesting to discover the visual mechanisms Edith adopts to include trauma within her work in a sensitive way. By directing the camera to more dream-like footage a supportive balance is struck between the weight of the story being told and the accompanying video.

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<sup>15</sup> Appendix 1.

<sup>16</sup> Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery, n.d., <https://www.adamartgallery.nz/exhibitions/archive/2023/legacies-five-short-artist-films>.



Figure 24: *Aidan* by Russell Kleyn and Ming Ranginui, 2023.

Aidan is Ming's partner. He works as a youth councillor in Porirua and is a great support to Ming and her art career. Aidan is a bit shy and not overly keen on being part of our joint project, but we sometimes convince him to join. For me, this portrait represents the tug-of-war between his desire to assist and his discomfort about being included in the photos.

Ming sends me a message about a car for sale in Masterton. It has a pink sparkly paint job with Playboy bunny emblems on the bonnet and sides. I can see the car aligns with Ming's aesthetic reminding me of her car artwork (fig: 25) I saw at the *Matarau exhibition* (2022) at The City Gallery.<sup>17</sup>

Figure 25: *angel numbers on the dash*, by Ming Ranginui 2022.

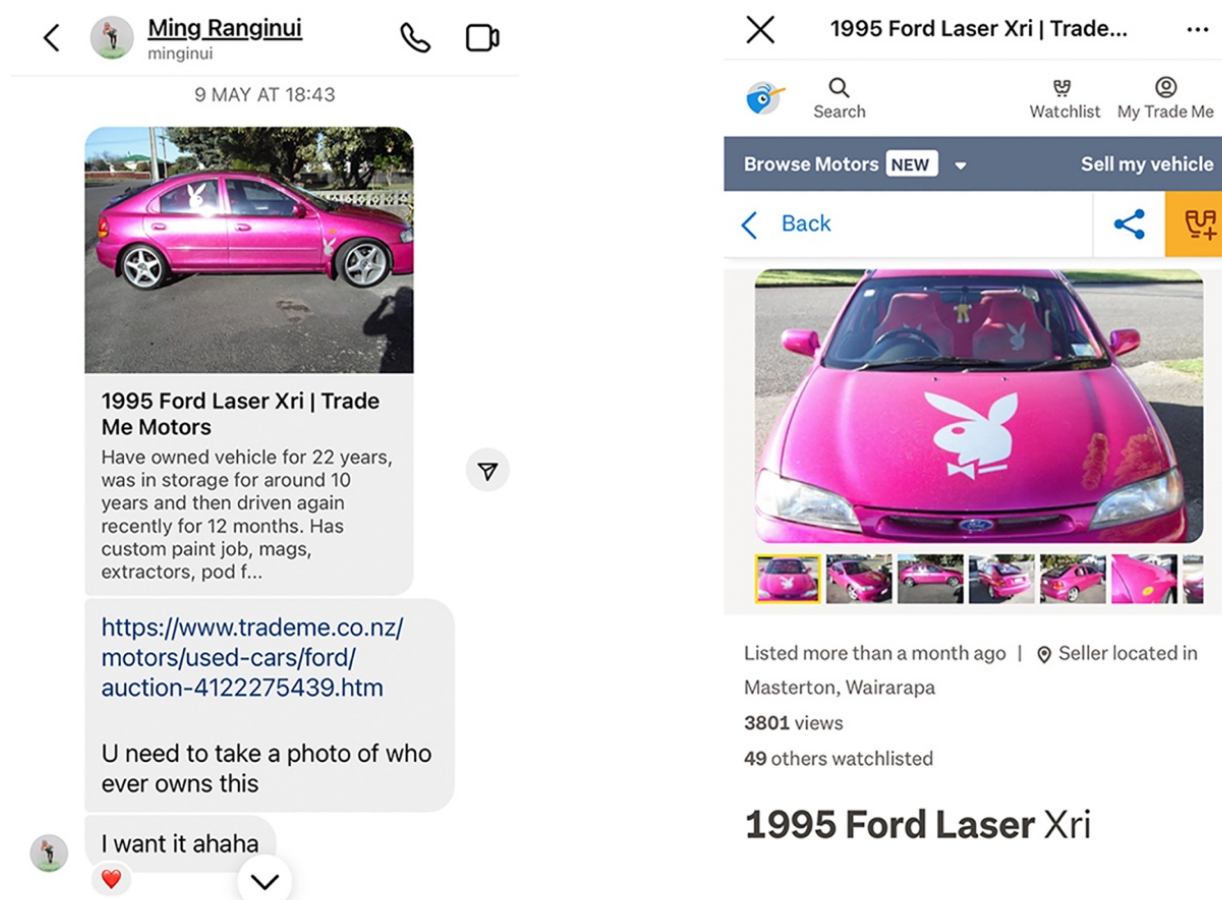


Figure 26: Instagram message from Ming and the TradeMe advertisement it references, 2023.

<sup>17</sup> City Gallery Wellington, "Matarau," April 30 - August 14, 2022, <https://citygallery.org.nz/exhibitions/matarau/>.

In the message Ming states: ‘u need to take a photo of whoever owns this’ and ‘I want it ahaha’ I let the idea stew for a bit and then a couple of months later I get the opportunity to travel to Masterton for a commissioned job and decided to contact the owner of the pink Playboy car via Trade Me and line up a time to photograph the car.

Anna, the owner, mentions that she is not keen to have her portrait taken but would do a short interview about how the car came to be. When I search on Apple Maps for the address location, I am rewarded with a memorable street-view image of the car standing outside the property.

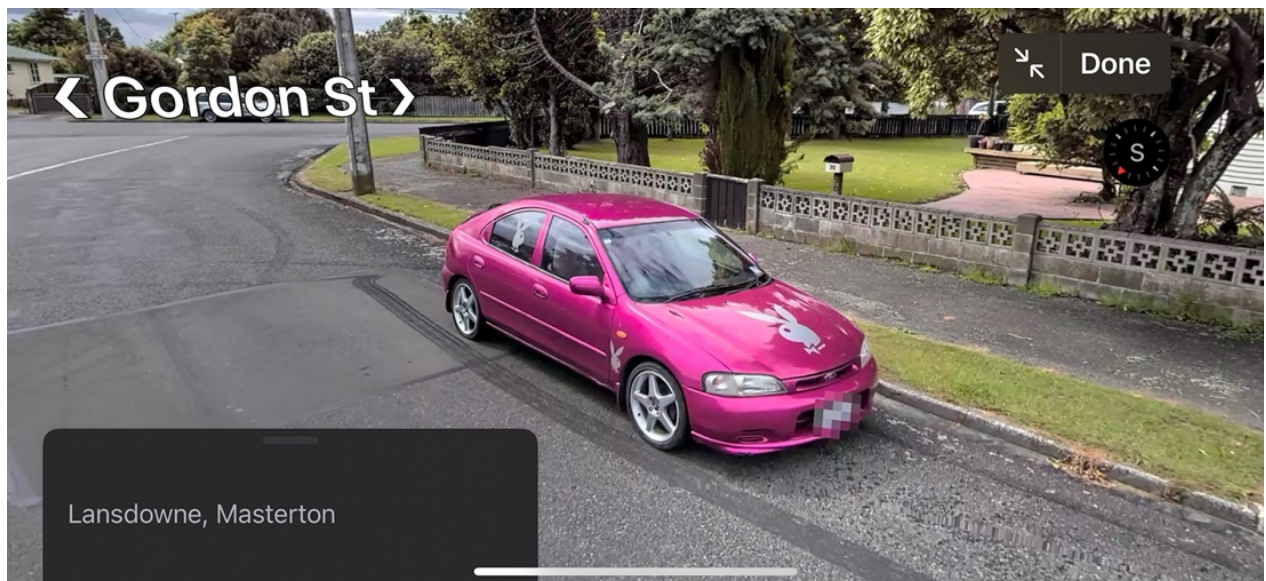


Figure 27: Screenshot of the ‘Street View’ of address location of car on Apple Maps app, 2023.

I meet up with Anna. We record an interview about how the Pink Playboy car was customised, touching on the pink colour and Playboy bunny emblems and their significance to her. Anna tells me that her husband Tim, a car painter, customised the car for her as a 21<sup>st</sup> gift. The playboy emblems are a private joke between the two of them based on a knitted jumper that Anna used to wear with an emblem of the playboy bunny on it. A love story.

I take some close-up photos of the car.



Figure 28: *Playboy* by Russell Kleyn and Ming Ranginui, 2023.

While I am photographing the pink car a couple of teenage boys turn up on the street on their quad bikes and start doing wheelies. I asked them if it would be possible to photograph them? It was a serendipitous opportunity as I already had my lighting gear set up. Anonymous, they are wearing track suits with black satin balaclavas, gloves, and goggles. (fig: 29)



Figure 29: *Ming's Brothers* by Russell Kleyn and Ming Ranginui, 2023.

Ming had told me earlier that her two thirteen-year-old brothers were coming from Whanganui to stay with her for a week during the school holidays. The boys I just photographed on the street are of a similar age. I am remaining open to chance occurrences. It feels to me that the speculative element to this work is starting to form. <sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The School of Speculative Documentary,” n.d. <https://schoolofspeculativedocumentary.org/>.

Shortly after photographing the pink Playboy car a white cat with black spots and yellow eyes showed up and walked around the car, sitting on the wall directly next to it. I photographed the cat in a traditional portrait style. Again, I am thinking back to my conversation with Ming about superstitions.



Figure 30: *Tohu* by Russell Kleyn and Ming Ranginui, 2023.



Figure 31: *Virgo* by Ming Ranginui and Russell Kleyn, 2023.

Ming and I are both Virgo's and we often discuss the Virgo zodiac sign and what it means to us. On a trip to the Wairarapa Ming made this portrait of me at the Stonehenge open air observatory near Carterton. It's cosmic.

I'm co-creating stories with my participants, rather than adhering to the traditional view of photography as a single-author mode of direct representation. "To create new modes of documentary that foreground the deceptive nature of images yet always emotionally and empathically engage people and their stories."<sup>19</sup> I am also moving away from the idea of the single subject, and incorporating photographs of other people, still-life objects, and even animals! I am even including sculpture by producing a replica of the pink Playboy car bonnet.

All these elements come together to create a portrait of Ming. This project feels more relaxed compared to the other two projects detailed in the preceding chapters, which rely on direct portraits to make an impact. The work with Ming is more mysterious and combines ideas from her creative process with mine, resulting in a unique collaboration.

Anna introduced me to her husband Tim, the original painter of the car, and he agreed to paint a replica. Ming and I took a trip out to Pick-A-Part car wreckers in Taitā, Lower Hutt and sourced two scrapped 1995 Ford Laser cars the same models as the pink playboy car. (fig: 28) We purchased the bonnets and transported them to Masterton to Tim at his car bodyworks shop.

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<sup>19</sup> "Speculative Photography : MAX PINCKERS," n.d. <http://www.maxpinckers.be/info/>.

I am engaging with the problem solving and production in making the sculptural works. The sourcing of the bonnet, the conversations and creative process with Ming while driving around finding car body parts. While we were at Pick-A-Part, Ming and I noticed the car stands made by the yard using two rims welded together. We both like the simple form, practicality, and functionality of the object.



Figure 32: Two car rims welded together to form a car stand at Pick-A-Part car wreckers, 2023.



Figure 33: The replica Playboy car bonnet in production, 2023.



Figure 34: The completed Playboy car bonnet, 2023

The finished replica work of the Playboy car bonnet looks outstanding. I am interested in cars and their use as an extension of people's personalities or attitudes. I touch on this in my interview with Edith Amituanai. Both Edith and Ming view the car as a subcultural symbol and an alternative social and domestic environment.<sup>20</sup>

I am interested in Richard Prince's fascination with cars and the found object or readymade. "To make *Hoods*, Prince acquired hoods from 1960s and '70s muscle cars, at first ordering them primarily from advertisements in automotive magazines—a continuation of the strategic appropriation" In his *HOODS* project, car bonnets are taken out of their usual context and transformed into art objects. The distinction with the Playboy car bonnet is that it is a replica of an actual car bonnet still in existence and everyday use. Replica cars and car parts are significant part of the motor vehicle industry.<sup>21</sup>

When I collected the completed bar bonnet from Masterton, Tim tells me that while painting the replica car bonnet it was great to recall some of the events from when he first painted the Playboy car for Anna. He said that he had one weekend to complete the whole car and ended up falling asleep in the corner of the spray booth on the Sunday evening as he was so exhausted. His boss had to come in and help him complete the spray job. I am really looking forward to displaying this work on a wall in the place of the photograph that I originally took (fig:28). "stock and customized hood forms as stand-ins for paintings"<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Appendix 1

<sup>21</sup> Gagosian. "Richard Prince: Hoods, West 21st Street, New York, May 10–June 25, 2022 | Gagosian," April 2, 2022. <https://gagosian.com/exhibitions/2022/richard-prince-hoods/>.

<sup>22</sup> *Richard Prince: Hoods*. (2022, June 3). The Brooklyn Rail. <https://brooklynrail.org/2022/06/artseen/Richard-Prince-Hoods>

I returned to Pick-A-Part again month later and bought a 'car-stand' and additional single rim and had them welded together. The idea is to get the sculpture sand blasted and powder coated in a hot pink sparkle finish. Ming mentioned that she is keen to make a 'cushion' out of fabric to sit on top of the sculpture. It is exciting to be working on a sculpture together.



Figure 35: Reworked car-stand sculpture before sandblasting and powder coating.



Figure 36: *Artemis* by Russell Kleyn and Ming Ranginui, 2023.





My sister Shelley and my father Mike, Somerset West, South Africa, 1977.

My first formally composed portrait at age 4 years old.

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### Six questions for Edith

Russell Kleyn: I've noticed a common theme across the people that I work alongside. They are all perhaps rule-breakers, mavericks, or provocateurs to some extent. Beyond her incredible story portrayed in your work *Epifania*, what is it about Epi that prompted you to pursue a collaboration and friendship?

Edith Amituanai: The prompt for the Circuit commission was Legacies, so approaching Epi was a direct response to that. In this case a kind of straight up way approach to the idea of legacy in a family, what has been left for you and how to pave your own way. I have known Epi and her family for a long time and her father's family are from the same district in Samoa that I'm from so we are bonded in that way too. She is our neighbourhood opal lying in plain sight so when I asked if she was keen to be involved in this film, she said 'yes, I'm ready'. I think timing is important too, when it's time for you to touch something or when you can see it, so Epi's enthusiasm was encouraging. My most favourite thing about art is collaborating with people I want to learn more from, people I admire. It gives you a real opportunity to work on a project with others, it makes art making real to me, it's beyond me and I need that.

RK: Was it important for you to insert yourself into your *Epifania* video work? It feels to me that you are there in a dual role of enquirer and support person as Epi reveals her story to you?

EA: As I was making a short doco I knew my presence would be on screen somehow, whether it was my voice speaking off camera or I was in the shot somewhere. On the directness thing again, it's a kind of strength I knew worked for me. A conversation between us speaking about Epi's life was a format I needed to respect and handle delicately. I once made a video which I interviewed young people

(from the ages of 11-17) about their experiences with alcohol and drugs. The film was confidential and only made to be shown to an advisory panel and by including myself in the frame, interviewing side by side was an approach made people feel comfortable. A kind of fairness of camera treatment. For Epifania, I knew I wanted to shoot our interview conversation in the car, so I had to be in shot for that. Sitting in the car side by side having a deep and meaningful convo in a carpark was one of the first shots we made. In an early edit it was my artist friend Sione Monū who suggested I put our conversation in the car first, as an opening. By front footing our relationship I had to consider how my varied roles an interviewer, friend and photographer could be used in the film. It was also very important to me that Epifania remained the star that she is, so my presence was included only to strengthen the film.

RK: I think my work is showing me how to become better collaborator. How do you feel you have changed as a collaborator over the last decade since making your *The End of my Driveway* series in 2011 through to your *Epifania* work in 2022?

EA: I heard Paul Graham say in an interview that he feels like he has an artistic collaboration with the world, and I felt that. In that earlier work I might have not interacted directly with those in front of the camera, but it's always been a dance with the world or my version of the world. Since I was using the moving image format, I knew I had to collaborate differently. I had to consider a lot more components, more characters, relationships, audio – this film is Epi's story and I guess this is my take on it. Art making is often collaborative, so this film pushed my approaches to it and in case for example I was not only directing from behind the camera but in front of.

RK: Your immediate neighbourhood, surrounding community and daily routine seem to be the source or starting point for many of your works? Are all the answers right on our doorsteps? Do you see your work as a way of understanding your environment, relationships, and own family?

EA: Yeah, I guess sometimes it's about that, understanding or sometimes it's about making visible these things. What it's about for me is access, the return visit to subject. I really like working that way, an embedded field work. Sometimes I like to describe myself as a one-man news channel, I'm the reporter, camera man, producer, and the caterer. At siren battles when people ask me what TV channel I'm working for. Telling people it may not make it to TV encourages me that the work needs to be seen especially by the people who are in it. I hope showing it online, and in galleries is enough. I may need more people to join me in my one man media organisation.

RK: Trauma surfaces in my *Matakite* work and in your *Epifania* work? Even though he is comfortable with it, it made me anxious to reveal parts of Raymond's life to the world through our work. Do you think it is important to shine a light on trauma?

EA: We discussed this and Epi was very clear that she did not want to skip over some parts as it's all part of her story. I think in response to your question I wanted to be sensitive about handling that and considered using the camera in a way that focuses on something else. There is a kind of normalisation she speaks of, that's the kind of house I grew up in in a matter-of-fact way. So, I thought the camera work should respond in the same way but also do something different, as it could be dreamier in some parts particularly in the hard parts of life. Richard Mosse who's work I think about often for many reasons, shot in the Democratic Republic in Congo with infrared film. Due to that type of film scenes of Congolese civil war are rendered in hues of pink and he said something about beauty as a tool, the sharpest tool in the box. A way to bring attention to an issue that is largely unknown by the world.

RK: Can we talk about cars?! When I first visited New Zealand as a tourist in 2006, I instantly noticed a keen interest in car culture in Aotearoa and how different the cars were compared to the UK where I had been living. There are a lot more modified cars on the streets here that seem to be an extension of people's personalities. You use cars in your

*Epifania* work and other projects. To me it comes across as a safe place for you to have the hard conversations with Abby about her life, and a mechanism for you to insert yourself into the video situated away from the other footage. The compacted nature of the environment in the car increases the intensity of the conversations. Then there is the siren car at the end of the video which features in other bodies of your work, which reads to me as a Samoan subcultural symbol.

What do cars mean to you?

EA: Bill Cunningham, American fashion photographer said the best ideas for fashion come from the street, from the people, not stylists. I came to cars in the same way, people were doing this thing with their cars, so I just followed the noise. I have thought a lot more about cars as an alternative interior space as a whole generation misses out on home ownership. You got that reference for the car used at the end of *Epifania* but it's also a symbol of joy, a portable dance machine. As I have photographed cars and their owners over some years now it was a way to fold some subjects together in a work. It is a safe and quiet space as you say, to have those amazing and hard conversations and as it's a roaming capsule it is not fixed, there is potential there to move and change. Visually it's a great device, a whole world contained in a car interior, Taika's iconic short film *Two Cars, One Night* was in mind here of course.

