Only fools, said the sparse ribbed rock, are ever lonely: multiplicity of voice and materiality in a contemporary art practice

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Ana Iti
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Abstract

This exegesis explores the trajectory of my artistic practice between 2017-2018.

It begins with a primer discussing my previous work in relation to notions of 'history' and 'truth', in order to unpack and interrogate these contexts further. From this foundation, I discuss how my current work engages with histories and texts, in order to open up more subjective experiences and feeling—exploring what form 'a multiplicity of voice' might take in a contemporary art practice.

Beginning with the text and audio-based works *Cast measurement aside 2018* and *Does the brick recall Pukeahu 2017,* Chapter one explores time and the resonance of material within my recent work. It considers the role of audio and text-based works within a sculptural practice.

In chapter two, I locate my artistic practice within a local contemporary conversation about decolonial and indigenous art practices. I discuss this in relation to my online work *Time is now measured in damage*, 2018, which takes a family taonga as a starting point to weave together different narratives and kinds of knowledge.

Chapter three focuses on the development and context of my large-scale sculptural work *Only fools are lonely*, 2018. This includes an in-depth engagement with Shona Rapira-Davies' public sculpture *Te Waimapihi* or what is commonly known as *Te Aro Park*, 1988-1993.

This discussion opens up an expansive field of enquiry within my practice, suggesting further areas of development and exploration.

Acknowledgements

To my supervisors Heather Galbraith and Shannon Te Ao—a sincere thank you for your time and guidance.

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Thanks to my classmates and my friend Anna Gilbert who drank beers with me, and listened to me complain.

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I would also like to thank the following wahine, who were involved in the exhibition *Ko Papatūānuku te matua o te tangāta/ The earth looks upon us*—Ngahuia Harrison, Raukura Turei, Nova Paul and Christina Barton.

Contents

Contextual framework and introduction

A primer on history and 'truth'

I first moved to Te-Whanganui-a-tara in late 2016, having spent all my life up to that point in Te Waipounamu and the last seven years in Ōtautahi Christchurch. At this point within my artistic research, I started to ask a lot of questions about the places I had inhabited. I wanted to know about the names of the place I had been living. What were their politics? For instance, the name 'Christchurch' was selected by a panel from the Canterbury Association before they had even set foot on the place that would come to be known as Christchurch. What were the materials of our cities? Where had they come from, and what could I learn from this information? What information about the built environment had I taken for granted?

My research involved engaging with a lot of information provided by city councils online, visiting places like the Canterbury Museum, the Macmillan Brown Library and the Hocken Collections Uare Taoka o Hā. While developing this more research-based approach to making, I also began to think more critically about the way histories are presented and communicated within institutional spaces. Furthermore, these institutional narratives had the power to shape everyday understanding of the past.

Part of what compels me to make artwork that directly engages with historic materials, archives, and history-making comes from a grappling with Aotearoa's recent history of colonialism and its role in the way this nation was formed. History can be useful as an initial point of enquiry. Furthermore, it opens up a realm of uncertainty. History is subjective, and in the archive the materials of history are often biased narrators, unreliable records, and shelves of objects—which are at times of provenance unknown.

One of the challenges of my relocation was figuring out how to operate in the context of a new place, especially as the histories of our cities are so complicated, and my practice tends to be very site specific. In 2016 I undertook a residency at Blue Oyster Art Project Space in Ōtepoti Dunedin, while there I developed an exhibition *Heavy to Hold*. I began this project trying to find a 'true history' of the Otākou peninsula sea wall, and the different layers of labour used to build and maintain it on an ongoing basis. The wall was originally formed using prison labour, undertaken by political prisoners, including peaceful protesters from Parihaka.

To learn more, I approached this subject matter with two people who held specific knowledge of the area: archaeologist Jill Hamel and mana whenua Ōtākou kaumatua Edward Ellison. Even within their distinct fields, both were very clear in placing themselves within limited realms of knowledge and opinion; Jill was happy to speak about the history of the materials especially from a geological perspective as she had worked around and researched this area for much her life, while Edward spoke to me about his Tipuna who had been a prisoner and the story of his whakapapa back to that area where he still lives and farms. Neither were able to draw definitive conclusions about the treatment of the Parihaka prisoners who had been held in the area, including when and where they were held, which has been an ongoing source of trauma and dispute.

In a subsequent work for the Centre of Contemporary Art, Ōtauhtahi Christchurch, titled *First, they chose a name*, I investigated the origins of the word 'Karaitiana'—a transliteration name used for Christchurch—and at what point and why this had come in to use. The narrative I uncovered was unclear, and information in this case was held up in the legalities of possessions from a deceased estate which meant it was unavailable to the public.

Reflecting on these past projects before beginning my MFA project, it became evident that trying to uncover a 'truth' or definitive answer was naive, as history is a subjective material. Furthermore, it was not the most interesting part of the research. Simply recounting the past is not a productive mode for me as I want to use language and sculpture to open up more subjective experiences. However, archival materials and public collections continue to be important research tools and intriguing structures I can develop projects around.

Figure 1. Install detail of *Heavy to Hold,* Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Ōtepoti Dunedin, 2016.

I also am interested in archives and public collections for other reasons. While these institutions yield and represent colonial power and hegemony, they can also be an important resource and structure for those of us who have lost parts of our histories, including Māori and other indigenous people. I am drawn to the complexities, several of which have been articulated by others, here.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith talks about the relevance of concepts such as 'history' and 'truth' to indigenous people in *Decolonizing Methodologies*:

> In a sense history is not important for indigenous peoples because a thousand accounts of the truth will not alter the fact that indigenous peoples are still marginal and do not possess the power to transform history into justice.[1]

In our context of Aotearoa, I would argue that any talk of history should also acknowledge discourse around time. Our common understanding of linear time and therefore history are western conceptualisations that are often taken for granted. In *Does Māori Art History Matter* (2014) the authors put it this way: 'Clocks and calendars do not measure time, they

[1] Linda Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1999), 34.

define it, as time—and by extension history—are cultural phenomena, not scientific ones.'[2] This text also goes on to further interrogate this framework by connecting it to ideas about 'progress', that a linear time indicates we should be looking to the future and that the past can be left safely behind us.

In *Heavy to Hold* and *First, they chose a name* I was very interested in the search for a definitive or truthful answer to my research questions, almost to try and 'reconcile' the past. It was an imperative that drove my investigations. I wanted there to be an answer so there could be some kind of accountability, to what end I am not sure. I think Smith best encapsulates the essence of why this type of approach can be unproductive, especially within the context of fine arts or creative research. As an artist, I am now interested in working with histories—and the relationship between past and present—to open up more subjective experiences and feeling.

On methodology

Through my MFA studies, I wanted to be able to better contextualise my work in relation to local and international contemporary art practice and art histories. My engagement with these paradigms has been a departure point informing the production of new work, which will be explored within this exegesis. This engagement has taken place in the exploration of new materials, forms, and contextual frameworks.

I will also elaborate on my tactics for developing writing and engaging with text as a sculptural material, and developing a practice that is focused less on 'history' specifically and more on what knowledge might be taken for granted or passed by as un-useful or mundane.

Within the exegesis I have broken my research into three chapters. In chapter one I talk about time and resonance of materials within my own work and the work of others. Chapter two talks to a local contemporary arts context and tactics in approaching text as material including collected narratives, multiple voices, and pulling different stories together. In the third chapter I discuss the framing and influences of my work *Only fools are lonely* in depth. I have included photographic documentation of the works discussed, transcriptions of text and audio works, as well as documentation and copy of text works made during my Masters studies but not discussed within this writing in the appendices following the main body of the text.

[2] Deidre Brown, Ngarino Ellis, and Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, *Does Māori Art History Matter?* (Wellington: Victoria University, 2014) 18.

Chapter 1) Time and the resonance of material

Does the brick recall Pukeahu?

In the text *What is material, is allegory material?*, 2012, on the work of Berlin-based New Zealand artist Ruth Buchanan[3], writer Ian White describes allegory as being a relationship between preservation and evacuation. He argues that to use allegory is to rely on a vessel that is evacuated of its usual meaning while preserving its original form.[4] In *Does the brick recall Pukeahu?* the displacement of material from one form to another and its subsequent scattering is an allegory inferred, and perhaps an easy thread to pick out in my personal narrative.

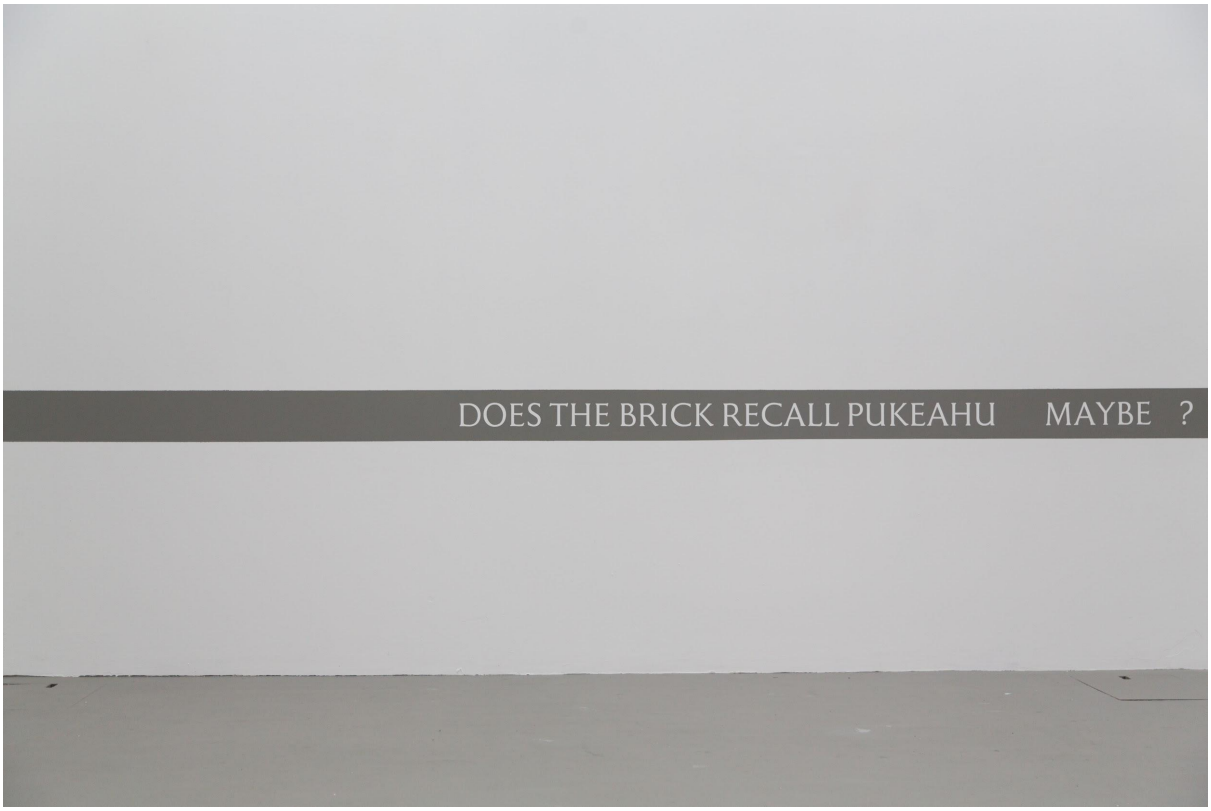

Figure 2. Install detail of *Does the brick recall Pukeahu,* The Engine Room, Te Whanganui-a-tara Wellington, 2017.

The text here is made visible by absence, as the letterforms are the white wall of the gallery set in the grey frieze. The text is broken into fragments that are laid out in different

[3] I discuss Ruth Buchanan's work in more detail later in this chapter.
[4] Ian White, "What is material, is allegory material?" in *The Weather a Building,* Ruth Buchanan (Berlin: Sternberg Press 2012), unpaginated. Found in 'Episode Three: A drop of water that moves swiftly' under subheading 'Evacuation' paragraphs 1 and 2.

formations on the wall, they fold around corners, run along with no spaces between, stretch out and break—gaps widening between words so that the end of one line and start of another are blurred. The frieze is installed just above knee height so the viewer must look down to see it, the work is always viewed in relation to the ground. To read it is an embodied experience where the viewer has to pace the full perimeter of the gallery, the full text being unavailable from a singular vantage.

Figure 3. Install detail of *Does the brick recall Pukeahu,* The Engine Room, Te Whanganui-a-tara Wellington, 2017.

In previous works I have relied on metaphorical reading of material to take much of the burden of meaning. This tactic seeks to draw attention to history and location, but I feel that this approach often doesn't allow much scope for personal interpretation. For instance, in *First they chose a name*, 2016, I used a piece of Halswell Quarry stone, upon which text was engraved. Stone here is the allegorical representative of time, belonging both to a deep geological time and also witness to more recent history. In particular, this type of stone was used by early European settlers in Ōtautahi Christchurch for many early buildings including the Canterbury Museum. Taking a different approach, *Does the brick recall Pukeahu* is an experiment around the edges of this tactic, instead of producing the material form—in this case a literal brick—it asks us to recall it for ourselves.

Does the brick recall Pukeahu is a work that I put together for our MFA Year 1 exhibition paper which resulted in a rolling series of shows in the Engine Room. Installed on the Massey Wellington Campus, this work spoke directly to the location it was in. The history of Pukeahu is that of a mountain flattened and processed into bricks, building materials for the city of Wellington. That levelled ground is the site of the former Wellington Dominion Museum Building, which now hosts Peter Jackson's Great War Exhibition and part of the Massey College of Creative Arts Toi Rauwharangi or Art and Design Campus.

The format used in this work references a series of works by prominent Cuban-American artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres, often referred to as either "dateline" or textual portraits. They are made up of a string of dates and words which are painted directly on the walls of the gallery, where the ceiling and wall meet. Unlike my iteration, in Gonzalez-Torres' works the viewer is asked to crane their neck looking up to discern the text. These works have taken different forms, including more institutional projects like *Untitled (Portrait of the Cincinnati Art Museum)* which lists in no particular order dates and events relevant in a broader historiographic sense, i.e.:

> '…A-Bomb 1945 Guernica (1937) 1940 the light bulb 1879…'

Some are more intimate and personal portraits like *Untitled (portrait of Julie Ault)* 1991*:*

> '…1950 Dance turned Into A Romance 1980 Hair 1979 Hatchet 2013 1970 Soul On Ice…'

These works are intended to be installed around the perimeter of the gallery. Instead of creating a timeline in a linear progression, the layout means there is no hierarchy between the events. The line has no beginning and no end. In the portraits of people, the dates and events are flattened out even further as the casual viewer cannot always distinguish even which date and event correlate. I observe that this leads towards a more poetic and abstract reading of the form, posing the question—what is a timeline? How can you name an event?

Gonzalez-Torres' work has been frequently re-shown since his death 1996, perhaps most notably as the United States Pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007,[5] and it is clear that the legacy of his work was a consideration for the artist during his life. As many of his works are temporal in nature, often the work itself lives within its ability to be reproduced,

[5] Gonzales-Torres' work was considered and rejected to represent the United States in 1995 as it was seen as too controversial at the time.

that is the certificate of authenticity and the stipulations on what conditions it should be re-shown as the work must be reconstituted on each occasion. In the dateline series, part of this contract includes a written list of dates and events with the condition that more can be added or redacted in the showing of the work at the discretion of owner and caretaker.

Gonzalez-Torres' approach to the legacy of his work is evident within the contract between himself and joint owners of *Untitled 1989*—his self-portrait amongst the 'textual portrait series'—the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Art Institute of Chicago. Art historian Adair Rounthwaite describes that "In direct relationship to his own portrait, the rules and the guideline and intentions of these portrait works create a forum for perpetual vitality/life. The perpetuation of his life without stagnation."[6]

I was particularly interested in this strategy as an example of non-linear time where the dead are not left behind but an active part of the present. Though Gonzalez-Torres is no longer alive, he is still in dialogue with the people who carry out his work, a collaborator in decision making. This has influenced my own thinking about the practice of history making or telling, as processes of recounting the past, to a more porous concept where the historic can still be active and indeed participating in the present.

[6] Adair Rounthwaite, *Split Witness: Metaphorical Extensions of Life in the Art of Felix Gonzalez-Torres.* Representations, Vol. 109, No. 1 (Winter 2010), p.38.

Figure 4. Installation detail, Felix Gonzales Torres, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, 2016.

In 2016 Julie Ault and Roni Horn, friends and contemporaries of Gonzalez-Torres, made an exhibition of his work spanning multiple gallery spaces in New York, London and Milan. At Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York, they showed a selection of the textual portraits including Gonzalez-Torres' self-portrait *Untitled* 1989 as well as *Untitled (Portrait of Michael Jenkins)*,1991, *Untitled (portrait of Julie Ault)*,1991, and *Untitled (Portrait of the Wongs)*,1991. By showing a combination of these portraits, we can draw our own conclusions, what dates should be important to a person, what are milestones or memorable moments in life? It is a way of impressing relationships between people into the exhibition, forefronting them. Perhaps we can draw out years where important things might be happening amongst friends, or in contrast the personal in relation to a wider socio-political context. After all, history and linear time are stories that have been told to us.

In *Erotohistoriography* Elizabeth Freeman talks about this as a queer politics of time, pushing back against what could be termed as colonial or empirical notions of time that indicate what moments in history can and should be considered important, or indeed "History" at all.

> Post imperial nation-states still track and manage their own denizens through an official timeline, effectively shaping the contours of a meaningful life by registering

> some events like births, marriages, and deaths, and refusing to record others like initiations, friendships, and contact with the dead.[7]

These tactics are evident in Gonzalez-Torres work which makes room for the histories of those who have been marginalized and intending for those histories to not only reflect watershed moments but the more mundane, feelings, intimacy and friendship.

Cast measurement aside

Cast measurement aside 2018 is an audio work I developed and presented in a blacked-out gallery space, which was completely empty, other than a bench to sit on. The work plays on a loop and is in total six minutes in duration. This time is split into three portions with my voice reading aloud and then a pause in between.

Each section investigates a story that is linked to the sea and different conceptions of the passage of time: a description of the bored holes in the basement of former Wellington Public Library—now City Gallery Wellington—through which the nearby sea can be heard, the story of a carved marakihau pendant belonging to my brother, and a retelling of James Cerroni's arrival into the Whangaroa harbour and the allegory of his watch. An excerpt reads:

> *Another perspective on this story is that this brief encounter with the western conceptualisation of time was a herald of grave changes to come in te ao māori.*
>
> *how long did it take for the mechanism of the watch to seize in its descent to the sea floor?*
>
> *was it swallowed by a kahawai on the way down?*
>
> *did the watch, having washed closer to the shore, take to tunnelling into the seafloor starting again as a pipi?*
>
> *or perhaps, having finally cast measurement aside, it settled silently in a bed of oysters*

[7] Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories.* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press Books, 2010), 58.

In darkness our perception of space and orientation tend to become confused. When the recorded voice speaks it is intimate, almost from within the listener's own head. I wanted to create an environment where all there was to do was listen. There was scope to shut down other indicators and focus only on words being spoken.

Bringing the three texts together provided an opportunity to trace different instances of time, that is: an embodied time marked by clothes and skin rubbing the details off a carved marakihau, a solid structure built on ground manufactured where the sea once was, and of course, the symbol of western time and its arrival on these shores. Of course, the sea itself can be seen as a measure for time (with its relationship to lunar cycles) pre-it's western conception, and continuing through the centuries of its evolution.

This work also reflects my endeavour to make work that has this layered reading, including in this example the pragmatic, personal and historical. The looped voice means the listener can enter at any point. There is no discernible beginning or end, and therefore there is no hierarchy in the order that the stories are told or their importance. I would argue that this approach also offers the viewer the opportunity to create their own connections between texts, further than what I intended.

***

I revised and re-presented this work later in 2018, when I was invited by The Physics Room to participate in a pair of exhibitions which made up part of an ongoing series titled (*Un)conditional*. These exhibitions are based on the idea of exchange and relationship building between The Physics Room and regional galleries in Te Waipounamu. For *(Un)conditional I* The Physics Room invited a group of artists, including myself, to show work in their Christchurch gallery space, in dialogue with and alongside works selected from the collections of the Aigantighe Gallery in Timaru. We later came together in a second iteration of exhibition in the gallery space of the Aigantighe.

The process of selecting a work from the Aigantighe collections was somewhat dislocated as the only way to engage with them was through lists. The main details of these were: artist, title, date, and material. In my engagement with the Aigantighe collection I was interested to see what kind of deductions could be made about their collections processes through the modest information available in the given lists. Within the timelines constructed by the dates in these types of collections, art histories can be read. It was possible to see works by particular artists becoming more important or more sought after, revealing material and

conceptual interests of the time. It is fair to say that the collections of this regional gallery serve a slightly different purpose than the collections of our national or major metropolitan galleries, in that they largely collect work of particular relevance to the area; artists practicing within that locale, or working with imagery of the region. In this context I was particularly interested in finding collection works by female and Māori artists, and in this pursuit, I came across a work by the prominent print maker Marilynn Webb.

The work in question is *Self Portrait - for the memory of Simon Buis 5/10* (1985). Webb's work during this period can be characterised as vibrantly coloured prints of stylised and abstracted landscapes. Some of her more figurative work—such as her protection work series—she rendered the silhouettes of her own hands, or abstracted water gardens. *Self Portrait - for the memory of Simon Buis* is an outlier in style, featuring a hand-coloured Xeroxed photograph of the artist with a woodcut border more reminiscent of the other works in her Pacific Countdown Suite. The Xerox is from a photograph of Webb taken by friend and artist Simon Buis who had been killed in 1980.[8] I was interested in the way this work operated within the collection, to me it seemed slightly incongruous. It had been bequeathed to the Aigantighe collection in 1994 by the George Sevicke Jones Trust. Someone thought it pertinent that this work was placed within the collection, was it because of the content or as an example of a wider mode of practice for Webb?

I requested an image of from the Aigantighe, they sent through a copy of their acquisitions card which I then printed and taped to my wall.

[8] His murder remains unsolved.

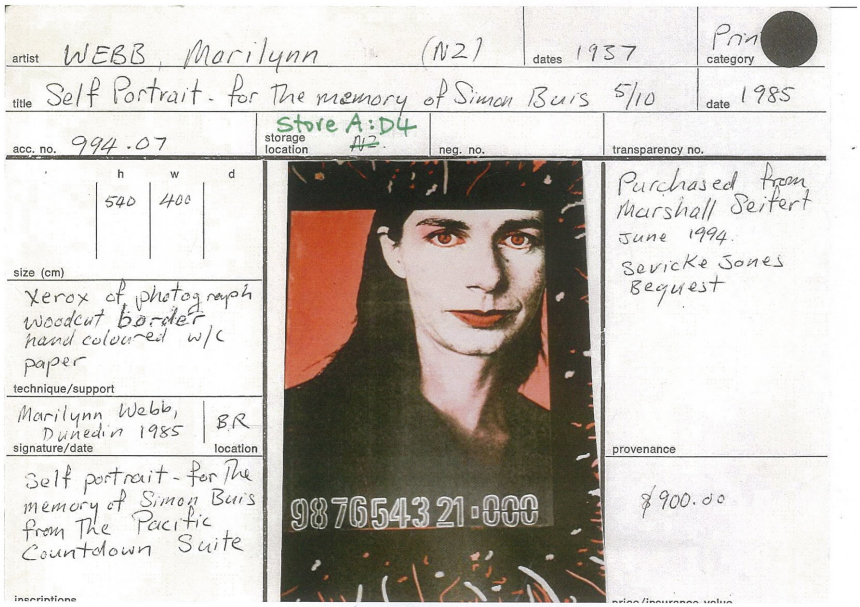

Figure 5. Acquisition card from Aigantighe for Marilyn Webb *Self Portrait - For the memory of Simon Buis*, 1985.

Another example of the operation of personal content within archives, and perhaps with a clearer intention is a suite of drawings made a year previous to Webb's work by Shona Rapira Davies. Davies graduated from Otago Polytechnic in 1983 and became particularly well known for her ceramic works in the late 80s, in particular *Ngā Mōrehu (The Survivors)* which was created for the two person exhibition *Whakamame* with Robyn Kahukiwa in 1988 and was later included in the infamous exhibition *Headlands: Thinking through New Zealand Art*.[9] The works I raise here are deeply personal writings from Davies about the death of her Mother and the dissolution of the family as an outcome of this event. They are handwritten in pencil and crayon on sheets of MBM paper just shy of A2 standard size. I first came across these drawings last year on Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa's collections online, while researching her work. The copyright for the images has since lapsed and they are no longer available on the website however the ghosts of the poor images[10] linger as the lower resolution .jpeg thumbnails available in Google images.

[9] Held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, in 1992.
[10] 'Poor image' is a term popularised by Hito Steyerl in her seminal essay *In defence of the poor image*, 2009, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/

Davies gifted the works to Te Papa in 1992, and provided an accompanying statement:

> I started drawing over a period of 2–3 weeks. It was almost like a record, I wanted to mark [that event] … then put it away again …
>
> They are probably the most personal of all my works, probably the most vulnerable … I thought they were too close to me … very quickly, I actually wanted to burn them.[11]

If the images of the drawings are not available to us, their content still speaks in the list of their titles:

Tangi, (Never marry a Māori…)
Tangi, (You people don't know what…)
Tangi, (When will I be coming home)
Tangi, (When will I be coming home…)
Tangi, (People are all the same)
Tangi, (But you said we were all the same)
Tangi, (Your mother is unwell)
Tangi, (Say goodbye to your brother…)
Tangi, (Your brother is going to)
Tangi, (Why do you weep…)

Davies sent the works to Te Papa, where they are now held in their collections.

[11] Shona Rapira Davies, "Tangi, (Never marry a Māori)," Collections Online - Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Last accessed 13/10/18, https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/39732

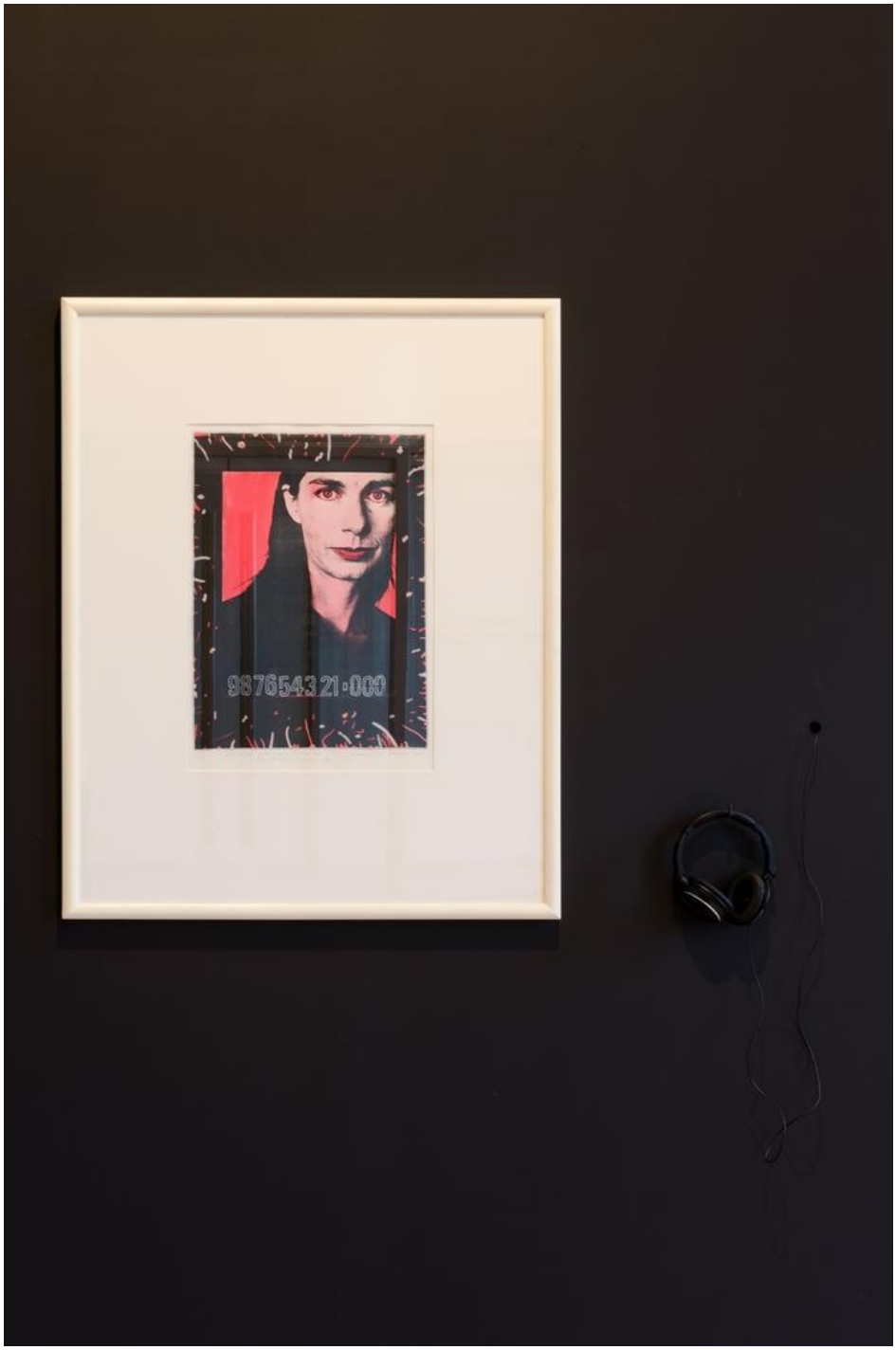

Figure 5. Installation shot of my work *Cast measurement aside*, 2018, installed with Marilyn Webb, *Self Portrait - For the memory of Simon Buis*, 1985, in *(Un)conditional I*, The Physics Room, Ōtauhtahi Christchurch 2018.

(*Un)conditional I*, provided me the opportunity to contextualise my audio work *Cast measurement aside*, in relation to *Self Portrait - for the memory of Simon Buis*. Both works tell stories. *Cast Measurement aside* is a spoken account told with my voice, with the story of Webb's inferred and left open to the viewer. In the exhibition, the audio was presented through a headset coming directly out of the wall alongside Webb's framed print. I think this

is a more successful iteration for this work as it strengthened by its relationship to a broader art history.

It wasn't until the second iteration of the exhibition in Timaru, *(Un)conditional V*, that I actually saw Webb's print in the flesh. The Aigantighe's registrar offered to pull the work out for me. They opened the drawer, propped open the Solander box and nestled amongst sheets of tissue was the unframed print. Remarkably, what the screen and photographic reproduction hadn't quite managed to capture was the bombastic hue of the inks. Her eyes which seemed red in the other representations were a glowing vibrant pink. There was a disjunct between the print as an object and its representation within the archival information card.

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Ruth Buchanan's artist book *The Weather, a building* was published in 2012 by Sternberg Press. In the preface to the book, Buchanan describes its function as a type of character study—which begins in 1939 and ends in 1992—of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin or State Library of Berlin. It is during this time that the collection goes through various stages of being and habitation. The books themselves are under threat from various sources including ongoing air strikes, the destruction of their storage facilities, the dissolution of the Prussian state, and the weather. The library collection is shifted and hidden in different stages with differing levels of success and organisation. Anthony Byrt describes Buchanan's approach to the book in his writing for *This Model World*:

> Buchanan isn't an author (although she is a very competent and elegant writer). She is a sculptor, an artist concerned with the volume of things in space; not just for what they fill up, but also for what they leave empty—the gaps between the objects. She is also interested in what happens when those objects, or volumes, are overfilled and begin to leak.[12]

Buchanan draws together multiple texts that describe the materiality of the Staatsbibliothek. The texts take different forms. There is a timeline tracing the movement of the books, Ian White's philosophical essay *What is material? Is allegory material?,* reprinted historical text, and the description of a decommissioned water sculpture from the reading room.

The weather, a building plays off of an old conceptual art trope found in Joseph Kosuth's famous work *One and Three Chairs* (1965). It highlights the slippage between object, image

[12] Anthony Byrt, *This model world: travels to the edge of contemporary art* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2016), 190.

and language. When we see Kosuth's work we ask ourselves, how is it that these three very disparate seeming categories all represent the same thing? Buchanan uses the Staatsbibliothek as a starting point to ask what makes the library. Is it the building? Is it the collection as a whole? Is it the books as discrete objects?

Within my own work I ask similar questions about what happens to materials when they are taken apart. In the case of *Does the brick recall Pukeahu*, the works provokes questions such as: where is Pukeahu situated? Is it within the site, the materials that made the mountain, or perhaps the memory of the material? Like the collection of the Staatsbibliothek, these categories have faced a slippage, they have been scattered, recontextualised and in some cases destroyed, but unlike the collection they are unable to be reconstituted physically. Their dispersal is fixed. Not only does Buchanan's work include multiple voices and perspectives, but the contents of the publication also work as an example of blurring the outline of definition, a tactic I have also used within my own writing including the text for *Time is now measured in Damage* and *Cast measurement aside*.

Chapter 2) Multiplicity in voice

Within a local body of practice

In her recent article for un Magazine *The quiet need no defence* 2018, Natasha Matila-Smith taps into a prevalent contemporary conversation, a movement within arts and curatorial practice to locate oneself within, or in relation to de-colonising frameworks. In the article, Matila-Smith critiques this trend in relation to its currency for pākehā and European curators and their instrumentalization of indigenous[13] artists within curatorial projects. Her argument is that, within art institutions, indigenous artists are expected to operate predominantly in ways that support what can be perceived as a 'de-colonial' narrative, and are passed over when they refuse to practice in this way, or are unable to do so. From this idea, Matila-Smith has extracted two modes of contemporary indigenous practice the 'Indigenous artist' and the 'quiet artist', which she describes as follows:

> The 'Indigenous' artist, is explicitly involved in politics with their primary goal being to disrupt the white cube. In recent times, this type of Indigenous artist has evolved to embrace pre-colonial Indigenous ways of life and reject colonial systems but inevitably having to do so within a traditional Western framework. In seemingly stark contrast, there are quiet artists. These artists of Indigenous heritage are either disconnected from or barely resemble what is traditionally known as an 'Indigenous' artist. [14]

There is definitely an active group of practitioners that could fall under this 'quiet artist' umbrella. I could consider myself one of them. But I'm unsure whether this type of binary is useful. Perhaps the 'quiet artist' is this generation's response to the categorisation of the 'Urban Māori' artist of the 90s.[15] This type of rhetoric has the tendency to pit practitioners against one another, especially in terms of their desirability to pākehā curators. This also has the effect of de-politicising the practice of the 'quiet artists'. Perhaps the crux of this issue is in terminology with only one bearing the label of 'Indigenous'. What I do think is productive take away from Matila-Smith's writing is the criticism of narrow scope for what types of practice can be considered as 'de-colonising' and the conflation of 'de-colonial' and indigenous practice.

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[13] Matila-Smith's uses the term Indigenous within her text to describe, in her words, "First Nations, Indigenous, people of colour and those who were displaced and most affected by European colonisation of Indigenous land." Within my writing I mainly use this term to discuss Māori.
[14] Natasha Matila-Smith, "The quiet need no defence", *Un Magazine* 12.1, 2018. Last accessed 13/11/18. http://unprojects.org.au/magazine/issues/issue-12-1/the-quiet-need-no-defence/
[15] This is a term coined by Jonathan Mane-Wheoki to describe a generation of artists including Lisa Reihana, Shane Cotton and Peter Robinson who grew up off the rohe and attended traditional western fine art schools in the mid 90s.

In *Te Ātinga: 25 Years of contemporary Maori art,* published in 2013, Anna-Marie White was asked to look to the future of Te Ātinga and its impact on contemporary arts practice. To approach this, she made a survey of notable contributions to the Fine Arts community made by Māori, and noted that her audit "describes the dominant profile of contemporary Māori art, which is firmly embedded in the Western fine art infrastructure. This representation of Māori is conditioned by Pākehā tastes and expectations about contemporary Māori art."[16]

While White's writing on this subject matter was printed five years ago, a curatorial turn towards the 'unbearable hotness of decolonisation'[17] has increased significantly during this subsequent period, and her statement here is still relevant to this contemporary moment. Matila-Smith and White both conclude that the contemporary art world is still mainly governed by pākehā or Western ideologies.

I cannot separate my own work from an underlying desire to engage with and learn about Te Ao Māori and through my practice is one way to do so. Whether or not this type of approach has the ability to decolonize the white cube is debatable, but it not an approach I have taken for the betterment of the galleries or institutions I have been working with. It is an important part of my practice, and my understanding of my chosen subject matters and materials as a Māori artist.

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Bridget Reweti's exhibition *Tauutuutu* at Pātaka displayed a moving image work that came out of a response to the Indigenous Visual and Digital Arts Residency 2016 at the Banff Art Centre, Canada. In the work, Reweti enacted various forms of exchange between herself and the other artists present for the programme. The artist describes the process of exchange on her website in the following way:

> These cultural exchanges explore the obligations of gift economies and embodied exchange rates through the portrayal of multiple contemporary indigenous realities.[18]

Within Reweti's practice, I'm very interested in the tactics she uses to build relationships with other indigenous practitioners and also to connect them to an arts community within

[16] Anna Marie White, "Te ahi kaa: A future for Te Atinga and contemporary Maori art" in *Te Ātinga: 25 Years of contemporary Maori art,* edited by Nigel Borell (Wellington: 2013), 63.
[17] This is phrase I have lifted from the title of the editorial from un Magazine 12.1 which can be found here: http://unprojects.org.au/magazine/issues/issue-12-1/editorial-the-unbearable-hotness-of-decolonisation/
[18] Bridget Reweti, "Tauutuutu", Bridget Reweti. Last accessed 13/10/18. http://www.bridgetreweti.com/new-page/

Aotearoa. For example, in addition to these exchanges—documented by photographs within the gallery and also a video projection of some of the exchanges taking place—Reweti invited written responses from nine Aotearoa-based writers to each of these interactions. In this way she is gathering people and joining them together, embedding the connections she has made with indigenous practitioners in this international residency into a local context, she is creating relationships between people, layering voices, narratives and positions.

This kaupapa Māori approach to practice is also evident within the work of Mata Aho (Bridget Reweti, Erena Baker, Terri Te Tau and Sarah Hudson). The collective works within indigenous frameworks and from a matauranga māori world view. This includes developing their work during wananga, and engaging in a teina tuakana relationship with Maureen Lander whose 1993 work *Mata aho/sitelines* the collective has taken their own name from.

In 2017 Mata Aho was invited to participate in Documenta 14. Alongside their large-scale sewn work *Kiko Moana* they developed an online satellite project Taniwha Tales.[19] For the website, the members of Mata Aho collected narratives around Taniwha, supplied by the friends and family. The web page encompasses a grid of blue squares subtitled with a set of initials and digits, each square takes the viewer to a new page that hosts one of the given narratives. The letter and number combinations can be decoded as the initials and ages of the contributor, emphasizing that the author is not the most important part of the work, it is the collected words together. The work brings together different types of storytelling, pūrākau describing taniwha, anecdotal accounts of coming into contact with them, and others stories that are perhaps only tangentially related. With this approach Mata Aho highlight the many different forms that indigenous knowledge can take.

Their approach has been influential to my own thinking around collectivity, making, and authorship as well as what can constitute indigenous knowledges and practice. My own contribution to Taniwha Tales was a story that I didn't value very much at the time, more of a question or a sore spot about the origins of my brother's marakihau. This piece of writing later became the base for two different projects. It was reconstituted as one of the narratives folded into *Cast measurement* aside, and the beginning of my digital work *Time is now measured in damage*.

[19] https://www.kikomoana.com

Time is now measured in damage

My project *Time is now measured in damage*[20]*,* was developed as an online project for Window, Auckland. It uses the marakihau—both as a mythical being and a family taonga—as a starting point for talking about a personal history and teasing out wider shared histories. An excerpt follows below:

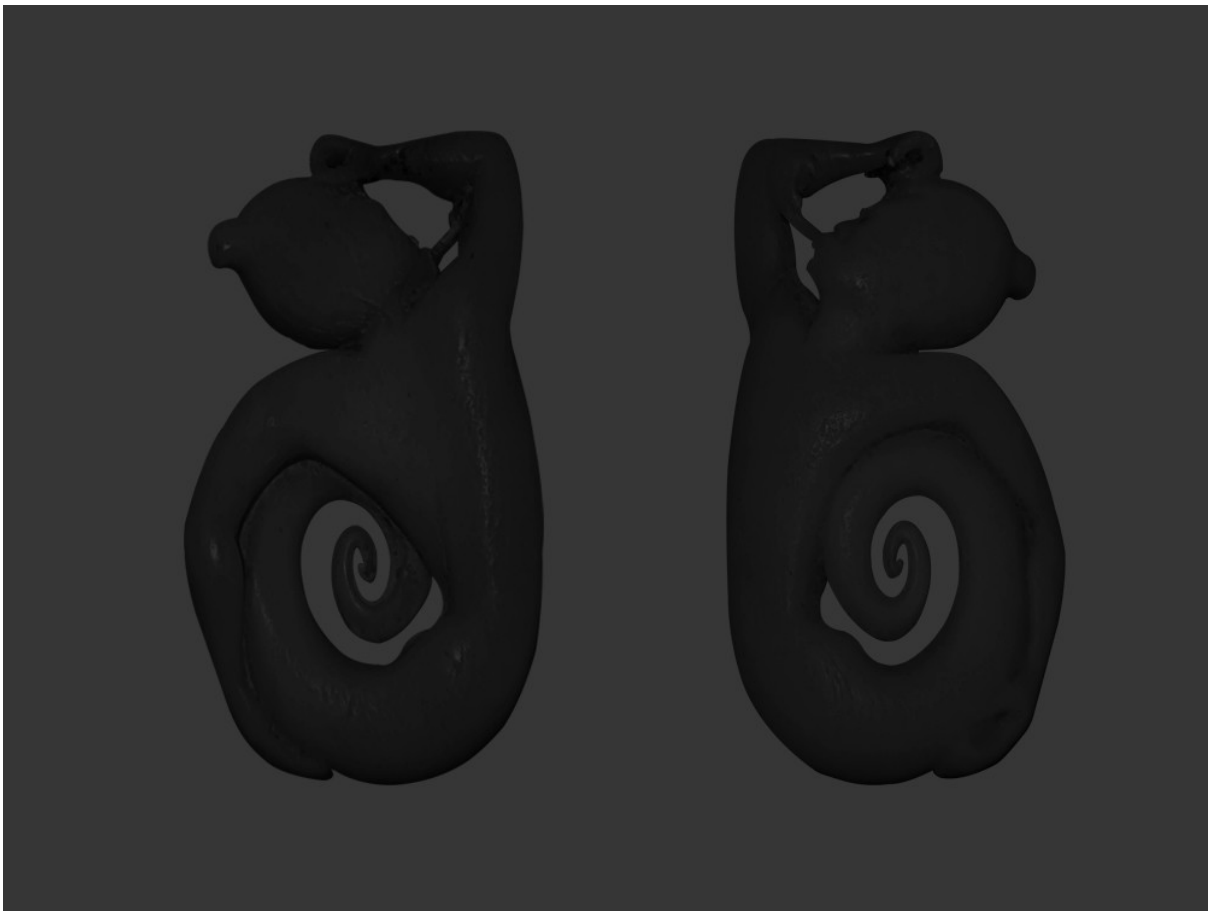

Figure 7. Image from the landing page of *Time is now measured in damage,* Window Online, 2018.

I've heard it said that a marakihau guards the Hokianga harbour. The place where I whakapapa to but have yet to return. In my childhood, my father and brother wore the same marakihau pendant carved from beef bone, skin oil gave it a yellowish patina over time. Our marakihau was made by pākehā carver Dave Hegglun and only loosely adhered to the traditional form, resembling a mash up of a fantasy novel cover and a Māori figure conforming to the body standards of a buff 80s wrestler. Over time the details wore away.

[20] http://windowgallery.co.nz/exhibitions/time-is-now-measured-in-damage

Time is now measured in damage is a scroll-based work located in the web browser. Before viewers can enter the work, there is a holding page with an image of our taonga and a brief text describing my brother's hobby as an amateur knife maker:

> *To make each knife my brother first finds a photo of a knife he likes on the internet, he prints off the image and lays it on top of the steel like a sewing pattern. He traces the shape of the blade and cuts it out carefully with a jigsaw.*
>
> *The handles he cuts out of pieces of recycled timber, first hewn into a rough shape and then weighed by the hand, using brass pegs and glue to attach them.*
>
> *He gives the knives as gifts. I bring mine home at Christmas and he sharpens it on a whet stone using cooking oil and plastic clips. To test the edge, he cuts through a sheet of white A4 paper, slicing ribbons.*

The work itself opens with a graphic, taken from a photograph of one of my brother Jesse's knives. It hovers on a white background. As the viewer tracks down the page, a line of text scrolls up arriving from the bottom of the window. The knife floats above masking the words as they pass underneath. When the text has exited the top of screen, the first knife slowly fades out and a new knife fades in. The knives correspond to different sections of text, and are arranged in what could be described as a motion tumble down the page—until the last knife, where the tip of the blade rests just above the boundary of the window, frozen in the second before passing through the frame.

The writing draws together seven pieces of prose, they read across themes of gift giving, the sea, family stories, and manifestations of the marakihau. Sewn together from things I have been told or heard, it includes a selection of titles lifted from YouTube videos of sea tornadoes—a form the marakihau has been known to take—, a recounting of the flood in my apartment, and the history of the sand acquired for the beach at Oriental Bay.

By drawing these texts together in relation to the graphic elements from my brother I wanted to explore a series of questions I had been contemplating: what is a family story? What are the things we pass to each other—are they stories, are they objects? Where are the edges of the definition for the marakihau?

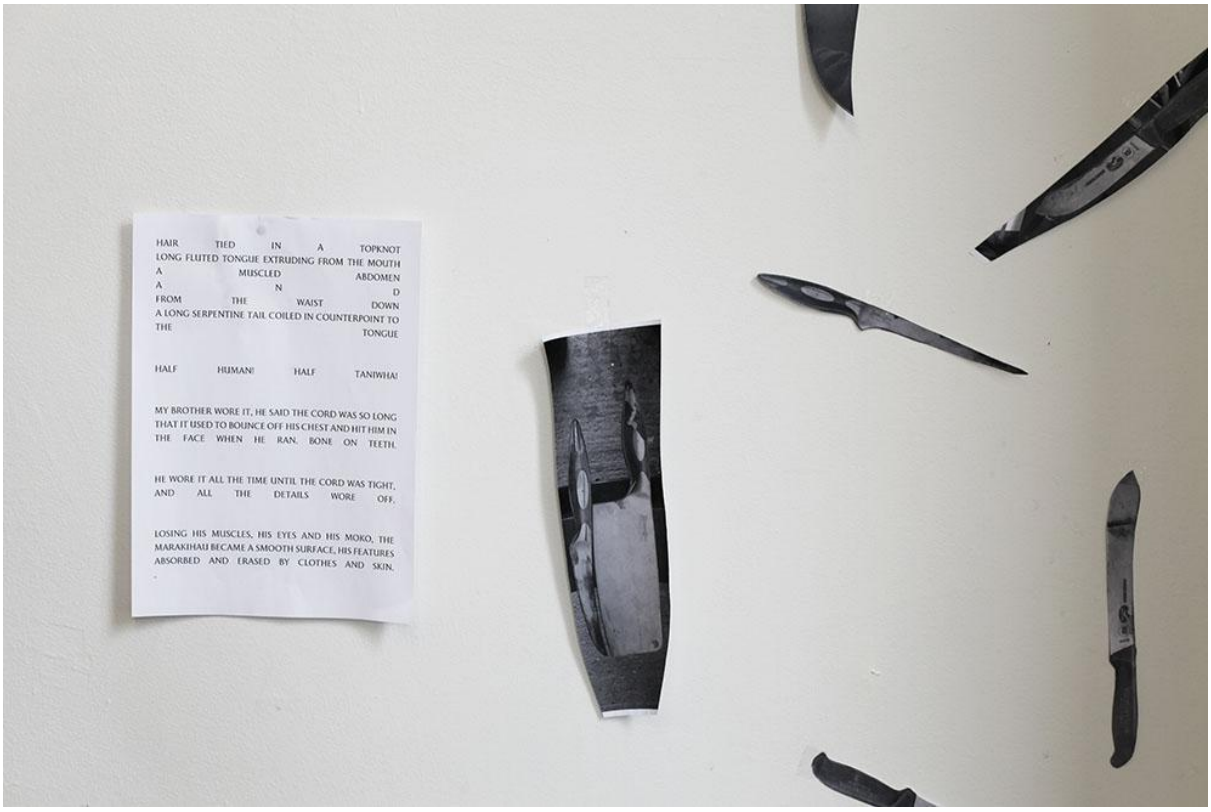

Figure 8. Research image from studio for *Time is now measured in damage,* 2018.

This project came from the desire to work in collaboration with my older brother. It was a chance for the two of us to think about our connections to the places we have lived, are from, and our family—in a lateral way—together. These questions about place and belonging have come up frequently my work over the last four years. In the process of making art I have found opportunities to ask questions and open conversations that in other circumstances are considered too difficult or have seemed inaccessible. Writer and poet Gregory Kan put it this way in his book *This Paper Boat*:

> I ask these questions, not so that I can write, but I write so that I can ask these questions. I worry that my parents answers are just another thing that I will be taking from them.[21]

Here Kan raises the conundrum of this type of relationship, a question I also ask myself, what are the ethics of asking for a contribution that will be put together in a way or context that is unfamiliar to the person or people you have taken it from?[22] At the beginning of this project I asked my brother if he would make some metal sculptures based off our marakihau

[21] Gregory Kan, *This Paper Boat,* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2016), 6.
[22] Of particular interest is a tendency to refer to this type of exploration as the 'mining' of personal history and the implications inferred within that framing of a 'finite' resource.

for me, they never came into fruition, I think that part of the project held no interest for him. I felt bad pressing a timeline as I didn't know if I should be asking him to actively participate in the art world, a system which he has no investment or interest in, and in the end I would be the person who benefitted from his labour.

Instead of the engagement I had asked for, he contributed to the project in other ways. He let me photograph his knives and reproduce them as graphic elements within the work. I reflected on the time we had spent together and conversations we had around making the work, as well as the conversations we didn't have. I also furtively encouraged some small trips in the car that I thought would be fruitful. We drove out to the Wairau bar and talked to one another.

A common thread that I can identify in my practice during the course of my MFA studies is intimacy. Sometimes, this is more direct—like my relationship with my brother—and sometimes it is spanning across generations and art histories, like my connections with Marilyn Webb's work and probably most notably Shona Rapira Davies, which I will illustrate later in this writing. In this way I see *Time is now measured in damage* as an instance of intimacy.

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I have also been influenced by Shannon Te Ao's practice—in particular, his use of writing and the depiction of intimacy and emotion in his work. This can be exemplified especially within the suite of three works: *untitled (malady)* 2016, *with the sun aglow I have my pensive moods* 2017, and his most recent *my life as a tunnel* 2018 at The Dowse Art Museum earlier this year.

Within this exhibition, *my life as a tunnel* was presented as a pair of projections played on two billboard-sized screens mounted back-to-back and positioned centrally within the space. This meant viewers could only see one part of the projection at a time, but in the dark you play of light bouncing off the opposite screen was visible. The black-and-white video is a study of two men, with the framing is cropped in close so we never see them all at once but rather the details, curled fingers traversing the neck of a white t-shirt, the profile of a lip. They grasp each other slowly, their touches skimming or not at all, they share a breath. The relationship between the two is unfixed, or perhaps it is the reading that moves as they shift their bodies in relationship to one another. To me it seems as if the moment is teetering on

the brink of something, the light seems to be changing, is the sun rising or setting? It's hard to know. All the while the moteatea rises and falls, filling the room.

The moteatea used in this work is one from a series that Te Ao has commissioned, asking multiple translators to take the words from the song 'This Bitter Earth' and interpret their meaning in te reo Māori. I am very interested in the way words can perform when passed through multiple hands, I would argue that this further iterates the openness of language, demonstrating that there is no one correct interpretation of a text. Matariki Williams unpacks another layer of meaning from the moteatea focusing on Te Ao's use of te reo Māori:

> Choosing to use te reo Māori in his work is pointed, highlighting the staggering loss of language experienced by Māori and conveying that loss to visitors by presenting a work that most will not understand at its aural value.[23]

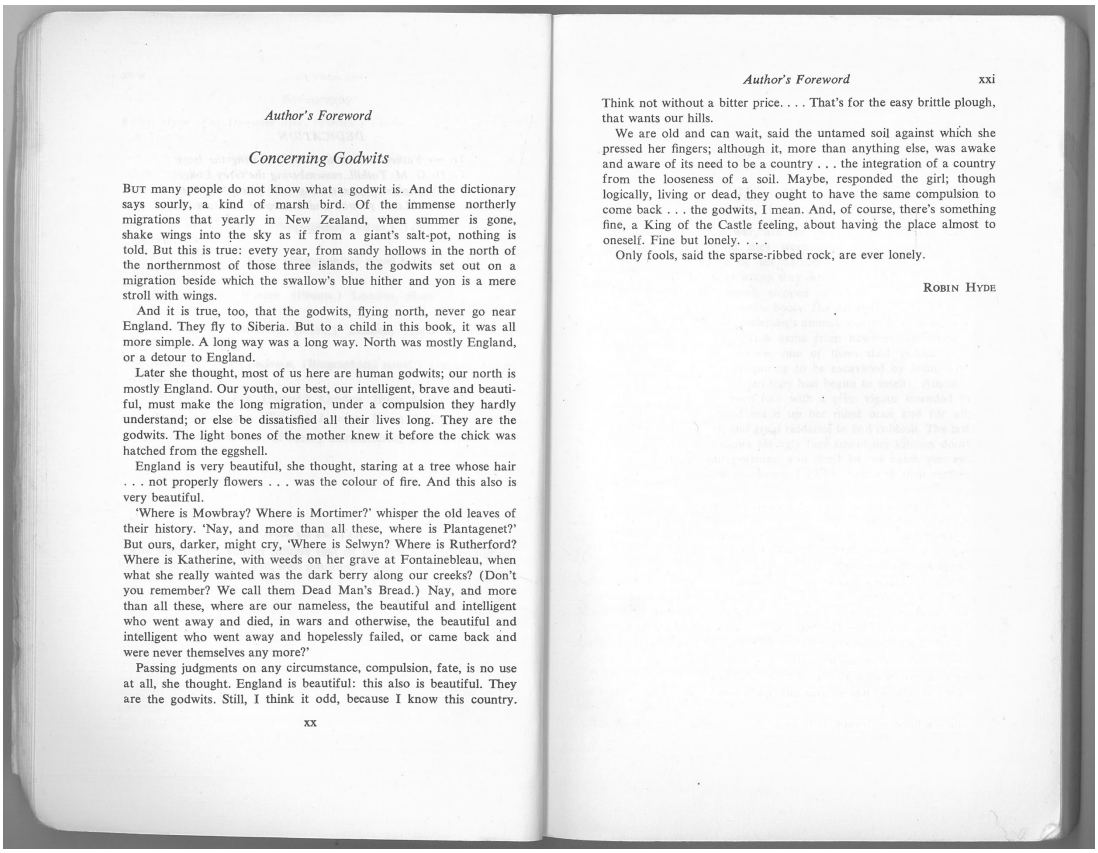
As an ongoing learner of te reo, listening to work brings out a feeling of melancholy, I recognise brief phrases or words but have difficulty stringing their meaning together. However, I can also measure a degree of progress within my learning. Williams goes on to talk about her own process of translating the moteatea to English with her father, how there are regional differences in the use of words and their meaning, how the act of speaking about language brings the two of them together.

[23]Matariki Williams, *The Singing Word,* The Pantograph Punch, 22.06.2018. Last accessed 13/10/18. http://pantograph-punch.com/post/singing-word

Chapter 3) Only fools are lonely

When I first moved to Te-Whanganui-a-tara I was looking for work. I had a lot of time and very little money. During this period, I started walking from my flat in Brooklyn to Oriental Bay each day. Up on the hill the harbour is your vista, I would look down at Oriental Bay's golden sand and project myself there. Blink and be transported, time changes consistency when you have nothing to do. I sat at the beach and thought about the transportation of material, how the golden sand had come to be there, shipped across the straight in barges from Wainui Bay Mohua in Te Waipounamu.

It was also at this time that I started to read Robin Hyde's[24] novel *The Godwits Fly*, a book I had started a few times earlier and failed to follow through on. Suddenly it began to make sense. The litany of place names was overlaid onto a more concrete map. I re-read the author's foreword *Concerning Godwits* which I have returned to often. I admittedly have not finished the novel, but the foreword remains resonant.



Author's Foreword

Concerning Godwits

BUT many people do not know what a godwit is. And the dictionary says sourly, a kind of marsh bird. Of the immense northerly migrations that yearly in New Zealand, when summer is gone, shake wings into the sky as if from a giant's salt-pot, nothing is told. But this is true: every year, from sandy hollows in the north of the northernmost of those three islands, the godwits set out on a migration beside which the swallow's blue hither and yon is a mere stroll with wings.

And it is true, too, that the godwits, flying north, never go near England. They fly to Siberia. But to a child in this book, it was all more simple. A long way was a long way. North was mostly England, or a detour to England.

Later she thought, most of us here are human godwits; our north is mostly England. Our youth, our best, our intelligent, brave and beautiful, must make the long migration, under a compulsion they hardly understand; or else be dissatisfied all their lives long. They are the godwits. The light bones of the mother knew it before the chick was hatched from the eggshell.

England is very beautiful, she thought, staring at a tree whose hair . . . not properly flowers . . . was the colour of fire. And this also is very beautiful.

'Where is Mowbray? Where is Mortimer?' whisper the old leaves of their history. 'Nay, and more than all these, where is Plantagenet?' But ours, darker, might cry, 'Where is Selwyn? Where is Rutherford? Where is Katherine, with weeds on her grave at Fontainebleau, when what she really wanted was the dark berry along our creeks? (Don't you remember? We call them Dead Man's Bread.) Nay, and more than all these, where are our nameless, the beautiful and intelligent who went away and died, in wars and otherwise, the beautiful and intelligent who went away and hopelessly failed, or came back and were never themselves any more?'

Passing judgments on any circumstance, compulsion, fate, is no use at all, she thought. England is beautiful: this also is beautiful. They are the godwits. Still, I think it odd, because I know this country.

xx

Author's Foreword xxi

Think not without a bitter price. . . . That's for the easy brittle plough, that wants our hills.

We are old and can wait, said the untamed soil against which she pressed her fingers; although it, more than anything else, was awake and aware of its need to be a country . . . the integration of a country from the looseness of a soil. Maybe, responded the girl; though logically, living or dead, they ought to have the same compulsion to come back . . . the godwits, I mean. And, of course, there's something fine, a King of the Castle feeling, about having the place almost to oneself. Fine but lonely. . . .

Only fools, said the sparse-ribbed rock, are ever lonely.

ROBIN HYDE

Figure 9. Scanned Author's Foreword from *The Godwits Fly*.

[24] Robin Hyde is the most well-known pen name of Iris Wilkinson. This name was taken up by Wilkinson in memoriam to her son of the same name who died not long after his birth. b1906-1939

In this piece of writing Hyde draws parallels between the Godwit, a migratory bird who habitually makes the journey from Western Alaska to Aotearoa, and herself, an immigrant who had come to Aotearoa with her parents in 1906 not long after she was born. Hyde describes the instinct of the Godwit to return north, in relation to her own inescapable imperative to return to England, the place of her ancestors. She proposes that this is a common drive amongst those who might be described as belonging to an 'imperial diaspora' but concludes that this need to return might not result in feeling at home. Instead those who travel might, even as the dead, need to return back here.

Within my research, I often think about the displacement of a material from one place to another and what that means for us here in Aotearoa. This is directly related to ongoing questions I have about my own ties to the land and place. This use of material can be read as an allegory for the displacement of a person. In particular the concluding line of Hyde's piece is a phrase I have returned to:

> Only fools, said the sparse ribbed rock, are ever lonely.[25]

What is it to be lonely? In Hyde's case I believe she wanted to acknowledge the ground she stood on as a vital presence with its own and characteristics. How can you be alone when you are held by this earth? We could also interpret this in relation to more contemporary dialogues, an acknowledgement of the earth belonging to a geological time greater than the brief flare of the Anthropocene. It can also be read in relation to discourse popularised by Jane Bennett in 2010 around the term 'vibrant matter'. But perhaps the most apparent interpretation is to think about this quote in reference to the body of Papatūānuku our ultimate female Tipuna. It was the multiplicity of readings from this line that stuck with me.

There is something in Hyde's writing, perhaps it is an ongoing notion of having to grapple with what it means to be in Aotearoa and how many of us actively have to come to terms with how we came to be here, that remains very relevant.[26] In 2016 Gregory Kan published his first book of poetry *This Paper Boat* in which he samples sections of Hyde's oeuvre. These selections are combined with his own autobiographical writings: stories of his family, his time in the Military of Singapore, and his attempts to find a friend whose status has become unknown—lost, missing, dead? Kan introduces a tactic for Hyde's inclusion within the writing in the preface to the book:

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[25] Hyde, Robin. *The Godwits Fly*. 1938. Reprint, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1980.

[26] It is here that I would like to acknowledge the historic and ongoing migration of people to Aotearoa, especially Moana-nui-a-kiwa and Asian peoples. Some recent scholarship into these particular complexities of identities has been undertaken by Lana Lopesi in her book *False Divides* and Emma Ng in *Old Asian, New Asian*.

> The apparition or figuration of Hyde is sometimes indicated in the short, as 'I.' But I also like to think that she, and other ghosts, can be found in all the white spaces of these poems.[27]

In the text this tactic allows for slippage between narrative, the initial 'I' for Iris being easily conflated as the I of the first-person voice of the author. At times Kan's writings overlap with his experiences of the same places that Hyde had been in, written in, and about. There is a reciprocal bent to these tracings too, where some excerpts from Hyde's own writings of her time as a war writer traveling throughout Asia in 1938 could have been written by Kan on secondment. I read the suggestion of these overlaps in narrative with in this line particularly:

> All dirt tracks look the same to me, at night. The gradual accumulation of sediment.[28]

It was in this spirit that I paraphrased Hyde's quote from *The Godwits Fly* for the title of my work at the Adam Art Gallery, *Only fools are lonely*. This work was part of the exhibition *Ko Papatūānuku te matua o te tangāta/ The earth looks upon us,* curated by Christina Barton. By using this title, I wanted to invoke the complexity of feeling both connected and displaced, that was conjured up by Hyde's words. The title also links in to various conceptual aspects of the work including its materiality and production techniques.

What is it to be lonely? As previously mentioned, my artistic practice is in part driven to expand on my own learning in Te Ao Māori. Within this project, I was able to do this by investigating Māori Art Histories and expanding my base of knowledge from the western paradigm of art history taught to me within the university art school system, especially during my time at the Ilam school of Fine Arts.[29] This desire is also a useful tool against loneliness, to actively place my practice, for myself, *within* a canon of Māori Art History, is to become one voice amongst many.

> *E kore au e ngaro, he kākano i ruia mai Rangiātea.*
>
> *I will never be lost, for I am a seed sown in Rangiātea*

[27] Kan, *This Paper Boat*, from the preface.
[28] Kan, *This Paper Boat*, 5.
[29] I studied at the Ilam School of Fine Arts from 2009-2011.

What is to be lonely? As Māori, grappling with connections to whakapapa and whenua, this position can feel like a lonely place. I am coming to learn, and continue to be reassured that for any Māori to feel alone in a spiritual sense is a fallacy. Even within te reo Māori the kupu mua meaning in front of— or before—in a physiological sense, is the same kupu for the past. Ka mua, ka muri.

Initially I planned to make every tile in this work with my own hands, but it ended up involving many other collaborators, who helped form the physical tiles, fire the kilns, machine the timber, and support the process. The amount of help I received during the making of this work meant that at the time of its completion, the usual feelings of nerves and reservation about public exhibition were not present. When I looked at the work I didn't just see my own hand but those of all the people who played a part in its creation. It also helped me understand a fraction of the experience the Shona Rapira Davies must have had in the production of Te Waimapihi or Te Aro Park, and I will return to this work later in this writing.

Only Fools are Lonely was made after I was approached by Christina Barton, Director of the Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi to participate in the exhibition that would come to be *Ko Papatūānuku te matua o te tangāta/ The earth looks upon us*. Initially this was intended to be three interlinked exhibitions from Ngahuia Harrison, myself and the estate of Ana Mendieta, who gave permission for a selection of her video works to be shown in New Zealand for the first time. The exhibitions were drawn together to explore the complex and evolving relationships that indigenous women have with the land. Both Ngahuia and I were offered substantial space within the gallery—in my case the entirety of the lower Chartwell—and we both developed a significant body of new work.

Five weeks before the opening of the exhibition, Mendieta's estate withdrew their support for her work to be shown, as she was intended to occupy the entire first floor—and in a lot of ways was the touch stone for us all—this caused a big shift within the conceptual framework and physical space. At this point, Nova Paul and Raukura Turei were invited to contribute, and a work from the University of Victoria's art collection *Mana Whenua* by Robyn Kahukiwa was also added. These inclusions shifted the framing of the exhibitions significantly, to a single group exhibition of Māori female artists, and the first exhibition of only Māori women ever held at the Adam Art Gallery. This was especially loaded as the exhibition was the Adam's contribution to the celebrations of 125 years of Suffrage.

What had been intended to be three separate projects that were closely interlinked had become a group exhibition. As these changes came to pass, Harrison and I started a dialogue as we were both trying to come to terms with the quickly shifting terrain of the exhibition/s, which for the two of us had been fairly stable in the six months previous.

As the installation of our work within the gallery progressed, the four of us got to spend a bit of time together. It was then that Paul noted our collective whakapapa to Te Tai Tokerau. As I spoke to Harrison about my work, which was heavily influenced by Shona Rapira-Davies's *Te Waimapihi* or *Te Aro Park*, she remarked that the two of them were actually whanau, not from the same marae but neighbouring one another. Remarkably, Harrison told me that her mother would visit Shona while she was installing the tiles in the park, bringing her food. While the intentions of the exhibition were interrogated within the symposium *No Common Ground*[30] on the day following the opening of our exhibition, the process of whakawhanaungatanga that came out of it for me was invaluable. Specifically, my friendship with Harrison has been one of my most valued outcomes from the exhibition.

Figure 10. Installation image of *Only fools are lonely*, Ko Papatūānuku te matua o te tangāta/ The earth looks upon us, Adam Art Gallery, 2018.

[30] *No Common Ground* was a symposium co-organised by Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi, The Dowse Art Museum, and Enjoy Public Art Gallery which took place the day after the opening of *Ko Papatūānuku te matua o te tangāta/ The earth looks upon us*. During the panel discussion 'Rethinking relations to place' —chaired by Chloe Cull and including myself, Ngahuia Harrison, Nova Paul, Raukura Turei and Kirsty Baker—the rhetoric and framing of the exhibition was the subject of the majority of the questions we fielded. This was difficult to respond to as the exhibition had changed a lot within the month previous and we had little time to reflect on its implications.

Only fools are lonely runs centrally down the Lower Chartwell Gallery, the length of its surface is nine and a half meters long by one meter wide—or fifty tiles in length and five in width. When entering the space, the work is laid out ahead of the viewer as a tiled path, one end just resting on the ground and the furthest sitting roughly above waist height. Atop the surface are two hundred and fifty hand cut and fired ceramic tiles. Their colours range from an orangey terracotta to a pastel pink, some flatter, some warped, and all with multiple imperfections from the cutting, drying and firing processes. The structure below them is cedar, orangey red in tone and very similar to the colour of some of the tiles. The slope of the 'ramp' is oriented so that when viewed from above, the support completely disappears and the tiles seem to hover in space.

The materials I chose for the project were both pragmatic in their function and further my conceptual exploration of material displacement. These were manufactured commercial potters clay, and New Zealand grown Cedar.

In this work I wanted to draw on the material poetics of clay as an allegory for accumulation and time, emphasising a connection back to the earth from which it came. In its commercial form, locally available potter's clay—which I chose to work with—is also a product that has been designed and manufactured to combine particles and ingredients from different sources within and outside of Aotearoa. That being said, the clay—which remains a product constituted from the earth—forms a body of no specific origin. I am interested in this clay as an aggregate, composed of things that 'belong' and things that have been introduced.

I also used Cedar for the substrate that supported the tiles. Like many trees in Aotearoa, either introduced for the purposes of economic botany or nostalgia for a familiar landscape, Cedar is a tree species that has been introduced. In the case of the timber used for my work, it had been grown in plantation here in Aotearoa.

In the Adam's stairwell leading down to *Only fools are lonely*, I had the opportunity to reshow and rework *Does the Brick recall Pukeahu.* In this context I was unable to wrap the text around the space in a complete loop, and had to work with the challenge of making it legible within the space as it was readable from multiple vantages.

Figure 11. Installation image of *Does the brick recall Pukeahu*, Ko Papatūānuku te matua o te tangāta/ The earth looks upon us, Adam Art Gallery, 2018.

The starting point for *Only fools are lonely* was an interest in an iconic Wellington public sculpture by Shona Rapira Davies, *Te Waimapihi* or what is commonly known as *Te Aro Park,* 1988-1993, which is located in the Wellington CBD on the corner of Dixon and Manners Streets. This work gained a lot of notoriety within the public realm during the period of its creation, as there were oversights within budget and time frame that were heavily reported on by the mainstream media. It was also the subject of a rather florid documentary by Pamela Meekings-Stewart *A Cat Among the Pigeons* 1992 which documented part of the production and installation of the work, as well as the ongoing conflict between the expectations and realities of the project from the Wellington City Council.

For *Te Waimapihi* Davies and friend Kura Te Waru-Rewiri hand-produced and glazed somewhere around thirty thousand tiles, incorporating them into a landscaped environment. Davies' ceramic 'park' recalls the site's history as a Pā where the Waimapihi stream once ran. It is a work with many layers of meaning that respond to the multiple histories of the site and navigating the many different realms that Davies had to manoeuvre in. In *Māori Art:*

History, Architecture, Landscape and Theory Dr Rangīhiroa Pānoho describes in part the complexities of this scenario:

> Public Māori art must often cope with many historical layers of connection present in any given landscape and the feedback of a number of different communities (not simply tangata te whenua) connected to their own particular point of reference. A more troubling side to Te Waimapihi was the range of immediate local concerns it seemed to raise. Project management and planning issues were openly aired and addressed in excruciating minute detail in the Wellington media. Budgetary blowouts and ratepayer anxiety regarding the financing of a project that purportedly did not meet its deadlines also seemed particular and recurring points of focus during the creation of Te Waimapihi.[31]

The historicising of this work always seems to focus in on the raruraru, rather than the content. In reality, it was this discourse that drew my attention to it in the first place. Te Aro park was a work I had observed only in my periphery, when I came to really look at it again I realised how substantial an artwork it truly is. It is incredibly detailed as noted by the selection of tiles impressed with kupu, various native plants and the hand and finger prints of the people who contributed to the tile's production. I was interested in the material labour involved, which is in part why the work became so notorious. Even though Davies had been making major works with clay i.e. *Ngā Morehu* 1988, she was by no means a commercial potter and the manufacturing of the work had significant difficulties.

In the documentary Davies made a comment that I believe relayed her attitude towards the project, observing that Papatuanuku (present within the clay) and Mahuika (present within the kiln) tested her and collaborated in her failures and successes. The tone and framing of the documentary at times feels exploitative and is uncomfortable to watch, however there is a lot of amazing footage of the process of the work being made, including Davies' Ōtepoti studio and the installation onsite here in Pōneke. What really struck me were the images of Davies and her collaborators in the studio. It was an engagement with materiality that was very familiar to me, working with traditional sculptural materials in a sculpturally pragmatic way, calling me back to my undergraduate studies in the Sculpture Department at the Ilam School of Fine Arts in Ōtautahi Christchurch.[32]

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[31] Rangīhiroa Pānoho, *Māori art: history, landscape, architecture and theory* (Auckland: David Bateman, 2015), 43.

[32] Ilam is a notoriously old-fashioned art school, where students are divided into discipline-based study. Particular thematic concerns of graduates of the sculpture department are craftsmanship, thinking through making, and a strong sensibility towards modernist and minimalist sculpture. This is probably heavily influenced by the mandatory Art History paper focusing on Modernism and Postmodernism (still offered today), or perhaps the brutalist architecture of the School of Fine Arts and some of the major buildings on campus.

Figure 11. Shona Rapira Davies and Kura Te Waru-Rewiri in Shona's studio,
film still taken from *A cat among the pigeons*, 1992.

Figure 12. Shona Rapira Davies in her studio, film still taken from *A cat among the pigeons*, 1992.

Part of my intention for undergoing Masterate studies was to strengthen my knowledge of conceptual frameworks around art. When I was offered the opportunity to be in this exhibition I recognised it was a significant opportunity for me in multiple ways. First of all, I was offered resources often unavailable—a significant artists fee, technical support, and a platform within a respected institution. I wanted to be ambitious in my project and it also made sense, in thinking about legacy as a tactic, to draw on local art historical content to situate my work. I thought a lot about how the weavings for *Ngā Morehu* were made by Shona's daughter at 14 after her first weaving classes. I thought about Shona's own words on making:

> Working in art is about using materials that I have just discovered for myself, materials that I am only just in control of. The rush of excitement in handling these materials without having previous background knowledge and there is a continuing rush of anxiety and fear of inevitable failure— So that when I sometimes succeed there is an adrenaline rush that is powerful and satisfying—just for a little while.
>
> I don't think that what I do is successful—rather there are parts that are — sometimes.[33]

[33] Shona Rapira Davies, *Native Bird productions: Shona Rapira Davies, Diane Prince,* Whangarei: Whangarei Art Museum 2003. Unpaginated.

I entered the project hoping to evoke this type of approach, without having to be an 'expert' and without dealing with the burden of success. Aside from the literary, material and art historical allusions, the work draws together various threads of my own history and bodgy formalism through a lens that references the work of an iconic wahine Māori. It also was a return to more sculpturally-based projects after focusing on writing, but also incorporating these writing practices within this project as part of its materiality.

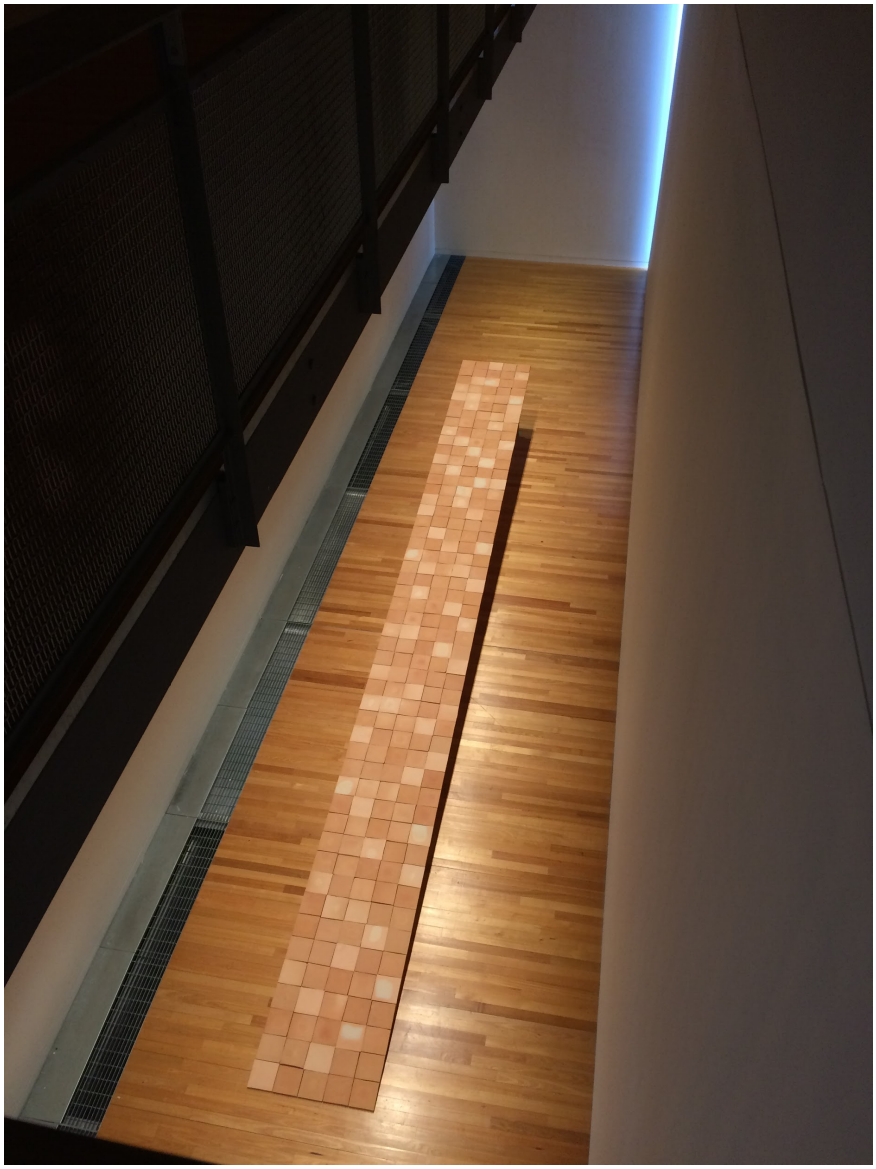


Figure 13. Installation image of *Only fools are lonely*, Ko Papatūānuku te matua o te tangāta/ The earth looks upon us, Adam Art Gallery, 2018.

On the last day of the exhibition we come back together.

We stand in a circle and listen closely to each other. Tina thanks us, we thank her and kiss her on the face, wish her a safe journey on her trip to London. Swelling steel guitar plays in the background.

From the highest balcony looking down I take a short video of my Mother wandering around, she is looking at the tiles, it's hard to know what she thinks. She doesn't see me. I post it to my Instagram story, and then I save it to my phone. I realise it is a special memory to have a mother look at your work, I want to keep it with me.

When I join them downstairs, my Mother and Sophie ask if I want to say goodbye alone. I realise this is the last time to see everything as it was intended, their exit is like time slipping away. Standing at the end of the gallery I look back. It isn't the orientation I planned everything for, from this vantage the ramp is a downhill slope.

I can't leave too soon but I can't stay too long, or maybe the feeling won't be right for a farewell. When I return to the stairwell I turn my head and see the text in the wall. Something that is absent. I think about that as I walk up the stairs.

Conclusion

Figure 14. Process shot of some of the tiles for *Only fools are lonely* drying in my studio, 2018.

This exegesis explores my artistic practice between 2017-2018. This period includes a significant move physically between Te Waipounamu and Te Ika a Maui, which also marks a shift in my practice and approach to thinking about place. Drawing from a foundation of previous research into the practice of history-making in the archive and built environments, my work continues to deal with politics of site and sculptural materials as well as their metaphorical and allegorical qualities. The use of allegory and metaphor can be found in works like *Does the brick recall Pukeahu* where the displacement of material from Pukeahu can be read as an allegory for diaspora, and *Cast measurement aside* which uses material metaphors for time.

I have used my MFA study as an opportunity to explore the use of text as sculptural material and further develop tactics of writing within my practice. In doing so I have had to grapple with the tools of narrative and voice and the relationship between text and image and text and form. I have looked at the approaches of artists and writers to inform the way I make decisions in this area, especially in thinking about what voices and types of knowledge are valued. In my text-based work I have included a combination of autobiographical content,

found text, accounts of history, archival materials, and anecdotes in hopes of not only flattening out the importance associated with these types of knowledge but also creating space within texts for feeling and the opportunity for the viewer to have more subjective experiences. Instances of this approach can be found in my work *Time is now measured in damage* as well as *Cast measurement aside*. This has also fed in to the ways I think about contextualising and framing my work. *Only fools are lonely* is an example of bringing these approaches to text back into more traditional sculptural materials and exploring the portrayal of more specific art histories.

In this body of writing I have situated myself within local art, national and international art practices and art historical contexts, responding to the various spaces I inhabit. Through this process I can't help but think of the challenges and possibilities associated with making or taking work internationally as I consider the prospect of moving abroad in the next few years. As well, there is the prospect of engaging more directly with some of the artists whose historical work I have referenced here. These two opportunities present themselves as productive challenges for further exploration and thinking.

List of figures

Appendices

Appendix 1: List of exhibitions 2017-2018

2018

The earth looks upon us /Ko Papatūānuku te matua o te tangata, Adam Art Gallery, Wellington, curated by Tina Barton (group)

Time is now measure in damage, Window, Online site

(Un)conditional I, The Physics Room, Christchurch (group)

(Un)conditional V, The Physics Room and Aigantighe, Timaru (group)

2017

The Old and The New, *SCAPE* Public Art Season 2017 Time in Space (territories and flow), curated by Heather Galbraith (group)

All the way to Te Rerenga Wairua, Mason's Screen, Wellington (solo)

Does the brick recall Pukeahu, The Engine Room, Wellington (solo)

On the Grounds, curated by Misal Adnan Yıldız and Bridget Riggir-Cuddy, Starkwhite, Auckland (group)

Appendix 2: Documentation and copy from *Does the brick recall Pukeahu* at the Engine Room, Wellington, 2017

Does the brick recall Pukeahu maybe ? not most people do long for something absent

Something that shifted but still continues

Each particulate in aggregate came from somewhere!
deepundergroundfromthesea34millionyearsworth!

Now a cement pill

Appendix 3: Transcript and link to audio of *Cast measurement aside*

Link: https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B_snv0AeMWtVTVhlLVRhR2xNM0E

Wellington Civic Square was built on reclaimed land
that is, it was once part of the harbour

there are some parts of the square that remain below sea level
the basement of the former library building
now known as City Gallery is an example of this
the basement is currently used for storage

If you looked at the floor of the basement you would notice rows of copper discs
forming a loose grid studding the ground
each disc has the approximate circumference of a fist.

If you picked one up you would see that they cap
a series of round bored holes in the floor of the building
each hole is surrounded by a cerulean blue ring

Water seeps up filling the holes
they seem to always be full regardless of the tide
though sometimes in the basement you can hear the sea

You might think that floor of a building would be a solid
demarcating interior and exterior
but in this case it is much more like skin
a permeable and unreliable barrier

***

Commissioned as a gift, a carved marakihau.

Intended to bridge a cultural divide.
Made by Dave Hegglun this marakihau was carved from beef bone, skin oil giving it yellowish patina over time.

hair tied in a topknot
long fluted tongue extruding from the mouth
a muscled abdomen
and
from the waist down
a long serpentine tail coiled in counterpoint to the tongue

Half human! Half taniwha!

After parting ways, the gift was returned. Perhaps, being made by a Pākehā, it wasn't a true genuine Māori thing.

My brother wore it, he said the cord was so long that it used to bounce off his chest and hit him in the face when he ran. Bone on teeth.

Once as child he came across Dave Hegglun at the Omaka marae and Dave recognised the marakihau, he said the marakihau guards the hokianga harbour, our moana.

Jesse wore it all the time he wore it until the cord was tight, and all the details wore off.

Losing his muscles, his eyes and his moko the marakihau became a smooth surface, his features absorbed and erased by clothes and skin.

***

In 1808 Captain James Cerroni of the brig Commerce sailed into the Whangaroa harbour. During the visit he dropped his pocket watch from the boat into the sea. His sudden departure not long after coincided with a sweeping epidemic that killed many people in the region.

For the local iwi the loss of life was seen as intrinsically linked to the loss of the watch, and the effects of this encounter continued to ripple out long after.

The allegory of Cerroni's watch is used to describe grievous misunderstanding between two cultures, how a misstep can lead to calamity for all involved.

Another perspective on this story is that this brief encounter with the western conceptualisation of time was a herald of grave changes to come in te ao māori.

how long did it take for the mechanism of the watch to seize in its descent to the sea floor?

was it swallowed by a kahawai on the way down?

did the watch, having washed closer to the shore, take to tunneling into the seafloor starting again as a pipi?

or perhaps, having finally cast measurement aside, it settled silently in a bed of oysters

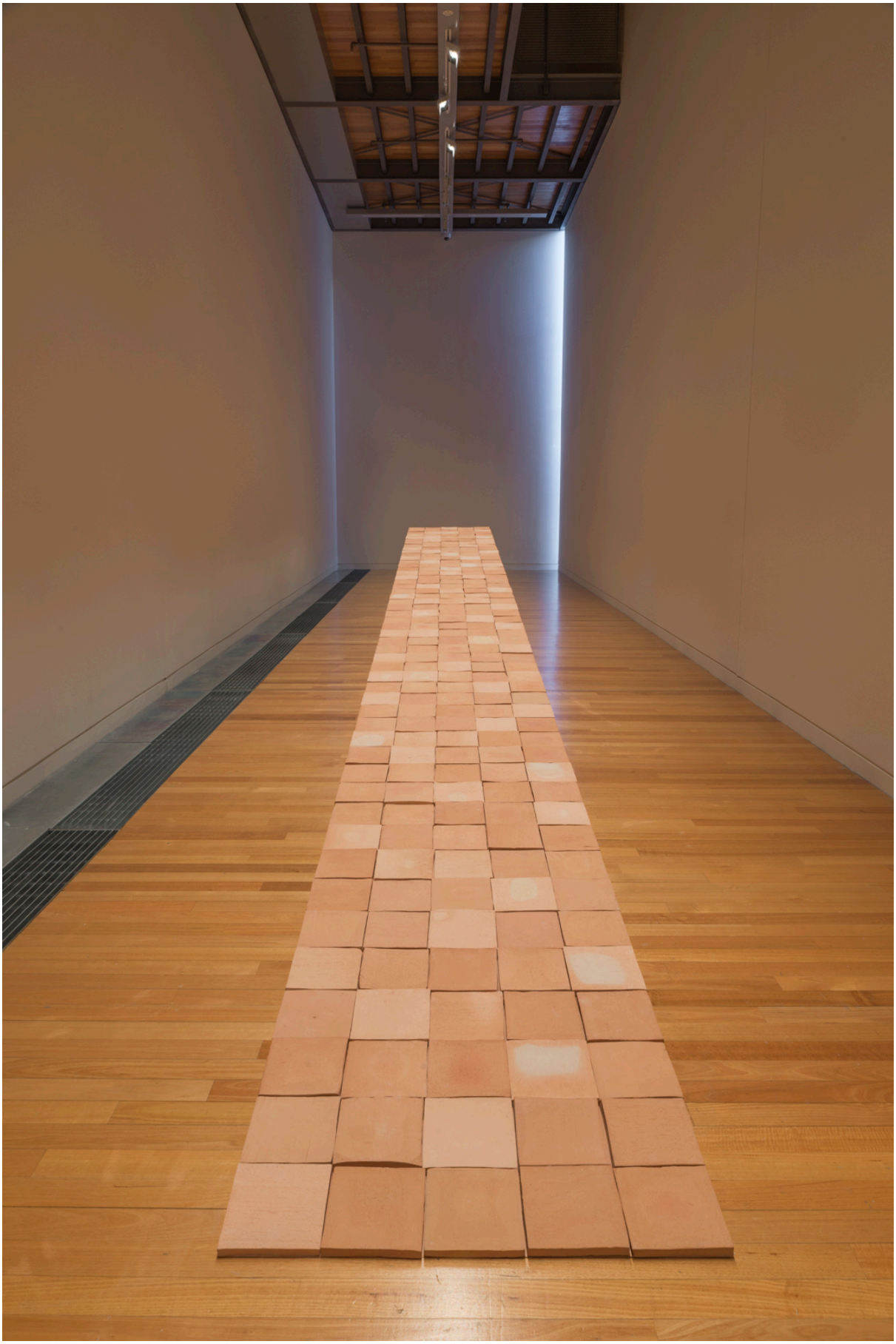
Appendix 4: Link to online work *Time is now measured in damage*:
http://windowgallery.co.nz/exhibitions/time-is-now-measured-in-damage

Appendix 5: Documentation and copy from *Does the brick recall Pukeahu* and *Only fools are lonely*, Ko Papatūānuku te matua o te tangāta/ The earth looks upon us, Adam Art Gallery, 2018.

The text in this iteration of *Does the brick recall Pukeahu* acts as a type of palindrome, read one way when approaching the lower Chartwell gallery and in reverse when returning to the stairwell.

Does the brick recall Pukeahu
maybe ? not
most people do long for something absent
Something that shifted but still continues
Each particulate in aggregate came from somewhere

Each particulate in aggregate came from somewhere
Something that shifted but still continues
most people do long for something absent
maybe ? not
Does the brick recall Pukeahu



Appendix 6: Documentation and links to works made during MFA not included in the exegesis

The Old and the New

The Old and the New is a work I made for *SCAPE* Public Art Season 2017: Time in Space (territories and flow), curated by Heather Galbraith. I have not discussed this work within the exegesis as I felt it dealt with the materials of the archive in a more direct capacity than my other work. Following is a description of the project written by Heather Galbraith which has been taken from the SCAPE website:

> Wellington-based artist Ana Iti (Te Rarawa) has made a new work in response to the historical development and contemporary aspirations of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens, using this site to explore the affect of inherited legacies. Botanic gardens serve many purposes: a protected green space in the centre of a city, a site for scientific research, a place for asserting a connection to and importance of another place (particularly key in gardens established during a period of colonisation), and a place for public recreation. They are evolving ecologies, reflecting the collecting imperatives and political and cultural conditions of decades and centuries past, as well as current thoughts and practices. Iti's text work along the front of the Nursery building uses compiled fragments from an article written for Christchurch newspaper The Sun in 1915 and the Christchurch Botanic Gardens Management plan, 2007. The resulting graphics, produced with designer Gemma Banks, highlight some aspirations for and challenges faced by the Gardens, including how native plants and trees have fared over its history. In doing so, The Old and the New highlights the politics and poetics of the Gardens as a 'living museum,' and the cultural construction of the way we understand and relate to nature in Aotearoa.


population may well escape
No consideration would have
and the placements of trees.
Some of those trees still remain, others have gone into the furnace.


How important is it to retain
certain plant collections in areas of
the Gardens just because it was
Pace along the pleasant winding paths between old-world blooms and old-world trees, realise that little more than 50 years ago the place whereon all this beauty grows was a waste.
Many species such as oak, azalea,
Sounds rather "tall" but, there were phenomenal yields of grain from the virgin soil in the early days.


the Gardens is eviden
The randomnes
the knowled
been given
have emerged. Many o
However, as the
of uncoordinated route
It has no overa
and, as root systems have
different purposes.
trees planted in the late nineteenth

All the way to te Rerenga Wairua

A text-based video work that reflects on the intangible possibilities of what happens to the spirit after death. Is the spirit able to more easily navigate the difficulties of a mixed Māori and Pākehā identity? Does it intrinsically know what direction to take between heaven and Hawaiki?

This work was commissioned by Circuit Artist Film and Video Aotearoa, and shown on the Mason's street screen. I haven't included it in my discussion due to the word limit of this thesis.

Link: https://www.circuit.org.nz/film/all-the-way-to-te-rerenga-wairua

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