



*The Interior* (installation view), 2019  
Oamaru stone, fibreglass, polyester resin, acrylic lacquer  
Auckland Art Gallery North Terrace, Curated by Natasha Conland  
Photograph by Jennifer French



*The Interior* (installation details), 2019  
Oamaru stone, fibreglass, polyester resin, acrylic lacquer  
Stone carved by Brett Tutauanui Keno (Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāi te Rangi, Ngāi Tahu)  
Photograph by Jennifer French



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#### Life in the interior

*Ka ngaro i te ngaro o te moa (Lost like the loss of the moa).<sup>1</sup>*

*We become-with each other or not at all.<sup>2</sup>*

The calls, croaks, and song of ngā manu (the birds) in Sorawit Songsataya's sculptural assemblage *The Interior* 2019 are silent. Birds of different species native and endemic to Aotearoa New Zealand congregate in an intimate relational space. This is an imagined gathering of ngā manu across varied geographical distributions and asynchronous time. Here birds from Te Ika-a-Māui (North Island) and Te Waipounamu (South Island) commingle in one location, and extinct species commune with the nationally endangered and critical, and the not threatened. Without a shared song, ngā manu nevertheless commune through position, orientation, posture, and body language. Together, the elegantly dipped neck of the kōtuku or white heron (*Ardea modesta*), the attentively extended neck of the matuku moana or reef heron (*Egretta sacra*), the tail-up curiosity of the kererū or New Zealand pigeon (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*), and the stilled reverence of the parekareka or spotted shag (*Stictocarbo punctatus*) incline towards the two prone bird species, the moa (*Dinornis robustus*) and the poūwa or black swan (*Cygnus sumnerensis*). In this intimate gathering, those with breath remember those without; those that can still exhale materialise those that can no longer. It is as if the perching birds are enacting a ritual for the prone birds that gathers together the vast yet interconnected emotional states of memory, mourning, and tangihanga (funeral rites). Of the prone birds, the two poūwa each loop and lace their long sinuous necks over their spines and rest their heads between their tucked wings, while the single gigantic, flightless, wingless moa appears as if laid to rest with its long neck stretched out, and grief held in the curl of one claw.

In this reading of *The Interior*, ngā manu are engaged in remembrance and silent incantation amongst themselves and *for* themselves. It is a reading that privileges the sociability of birds first and foremost. Yet many different elements, taxa, and species interact with each other, and the relationship of birds to humans is only one possibility amongst many (birds to air, wind, water, insects, fish, trees, flowers, nectar to name a few). Given the ritual, even refuge-like feeling of this bird-centred gathering, how can we, as humans, approach this event? Might we, as Thom van Dooren writes in a discussion about crows, mourn not just *for*, in this case, moa and poūwa and the gathered birds, but *with* the shadow of moa and poūwa and the gathered birds?<sup>3</sup> What kind of interspecies attentiveness and attunement might be required of us in this speculative undertaking? That is, how bird-like might we need to become? *The Interior* not only invites us to go within ourselves and the lives of avifauna, but to consider human and more-than-human relations in greater breadth. While birds and other fauna (and flora) have been used to understand human behaviour through metaphor, parable, and story, the silent incantation of this congregation of birds seemingly invites us to simultaneously honour ngā manu for themselves as we go exploring, and to not solely use them for our own elucidation.

As we listen with ngā manu, their attentiveness towards the moa and poūwa could potentially bring us into an encounter with the unfolding climate emergency through the finality of extinction and the expressions of mourning that accompany these particular

historical losses. While there is a physical finality to extinction, species make homes in ecosystems that are entwined with others, be they reciprocal, dependent or predatory. When one species passes forever, other species live or die with this absence, which is why, as Anna Tsing writes, 'extinction is a multispecies event'<sup>4</sup> that, either through choice (intentional noticing) or necessity, includes humans. Certainly the remembering and mourning of the perching birds in this gathering are echoed by human practices such as the many whakataukī (proverbs) by tangata whenua (people of the land) and iwi (tribes) including *Ka ngaro i te ngaro o te moa* (*Lost like the loss of the moa*) that dwell on the passing of the moa. In whakataukī such as this the moa lives on, without a body, in the genealogy of memory. In this sculptural assemblage, the moa and poūwa have rematerialised in, to borrow Bridget Sutherland's phrase, an 'uncanny return'.<sup>5</sup> This moa shares little resemblance with the skeletal remains or motley recreations of the 'natural history complex',<sup>6</sup> rather it is caught somewhere between 3D modelling and a translucent hologram. It is digital-smooth, without plumage, the colour of an iceberg or fittingly, the blue crystalline substance of the iron phosphate mineral vivianite that forms on decaying bones.

The colour of the moa mediates between epochs to encompass both historical and contemporary extinctions (which far exceed Holocene losses), and the as-yet-unknown relationship between contemporary and future biodiversity losses. In this context, any evocation of an iceberg is an invocation of solastalgia (distress over ecological destruction). By reanimating and rematerialising the figures of two historically extinct species endemic to Aotearoa (moa and poūwa) in our present moment, we are invited to consider our relationship to the rest of nature in a time of climate emergency and the sixth mass extinction. The digital, iceberg blue of the moa simultaneously travels back in time and brings the moa into our present-becoming-future. Likewise, the presence of the perching birds, whose population status ranges between not threatened and endangered, encourages us to enter into a relationship of care, or as van Dooren writes, to 'hold open space in the world for other living beings'.<sup>7</sup> How might we begin to hold open space for others? Perhaps by enlarging our sense of community, which may involve going beyond human communities, and certainly by recognising ourselves as part of the rest of nature we are in continual relationship with. Donna Haraway suggests that one of our tasks in this unfolding socio-ecological crisis is to recognise kin, to make 'inventive connections as a practice of learning to live and die with each other'.<sup>8</sup> Who else could be our kin?

In *Offspring of rain* at Enjoy Gallery (Wellington, 2019) Songsataya explored our relationship with the elements of water and wind and, as with *The Interior*, birds occupied a central focus in *Starling* at Artspace (Auckland, 2018). In all three exhibitions, Songsataya has held open space for the other entities we share this earth with; he has created artworks, exhibitions, and immersive environments for visitors to apprehend, recognise, and engage with potential kin. One of the central themes present in *Offspring of rain*, *Starling*, and *The Interior* is how to move beyond the dualisms of nature and culture, other and self, for certainly an inability to see ourselves as part of the rest of nature contributes to distancing, alienation, and the view of "nature" as a resource and therefore expendable. Instead of nature/culture dualism, Songsataya aims for a continuum between nature and culture. This is evident in the exhibition title, *Offspring of rain*, where implicitly, we too are rain's offspring. Likewise, this exhibition's title, *The Interior*, which is clearly installed in an outdoor setting, can be interpreted as a desire to present

this congregation of birds and their imagined nature-culture rituals of remembrance and mourning as equivalent if not profoundly related to our own ceremonial practices. How we see ourselves in relation to the rest of nature matters, especially as we contemplate the losses around us and to limit the grief to come. Meanwhile some birds are perching to varying degrees of population precarity and some are forever prone.

Robyn Maree Pickens

<sup>1</sup> Priscilla M Wehi, Murray P Cox, Tom Roa, Hēmi Whaanga, 'Human Perceptions of Megafaunal Extinction Events Revealed by Linguistic Analysis of Indigenous Oral Traditions', *Human Ecology* 46, 2018, p 464.

<sup>2</sup> Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2016, p 4.

<sup>3</sup> Thom van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2014, p 143.

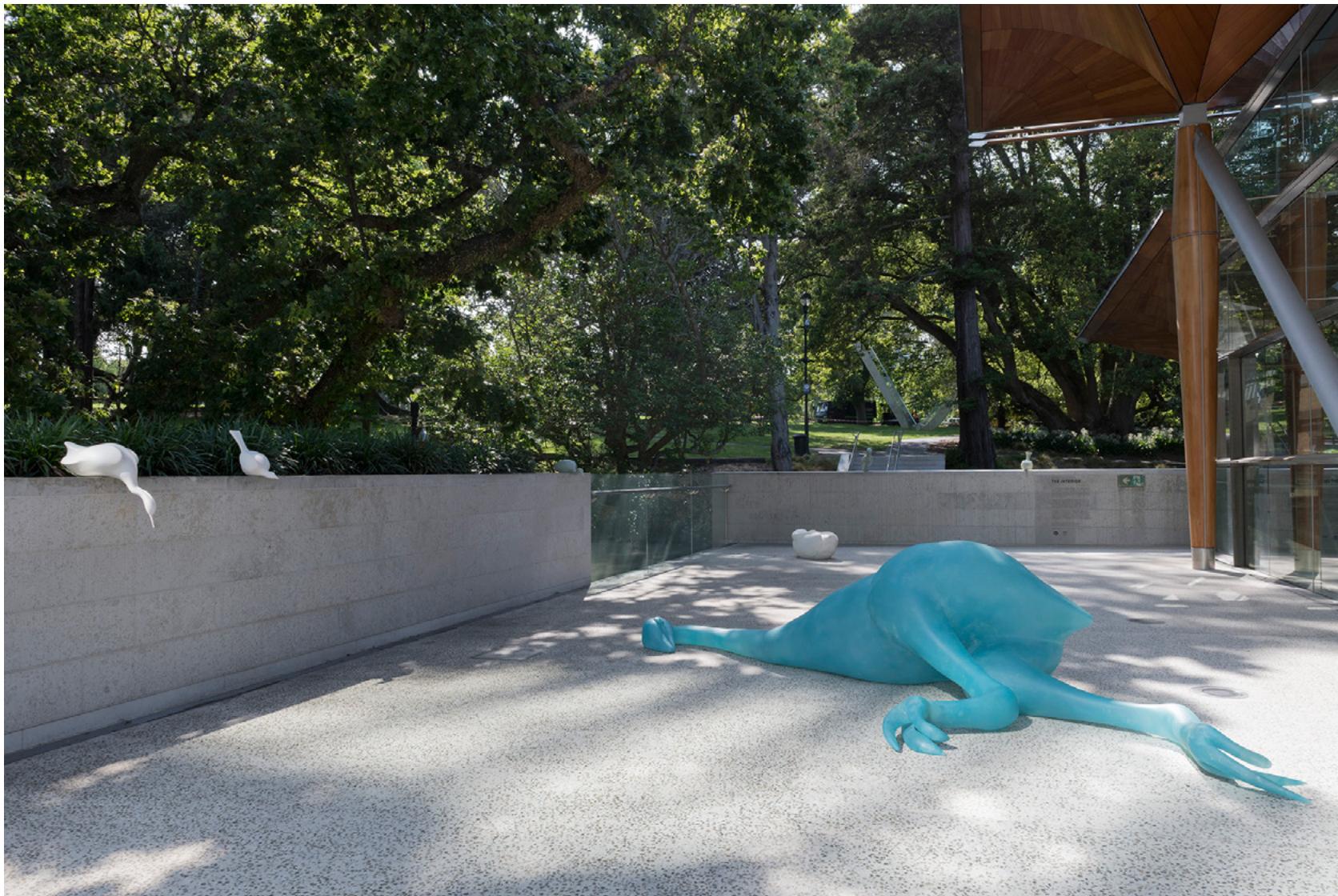
<sup>4</sup> Elaine Gan, Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Nils Bubandt, *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2017, p 4.

<sup>5</sup> Bridget Sutherland, 'Colin McCahon and Imants Tillers: The Care of Small Birds – An Ecological Perspective', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, vol 17, no 1, 2017, p 29.

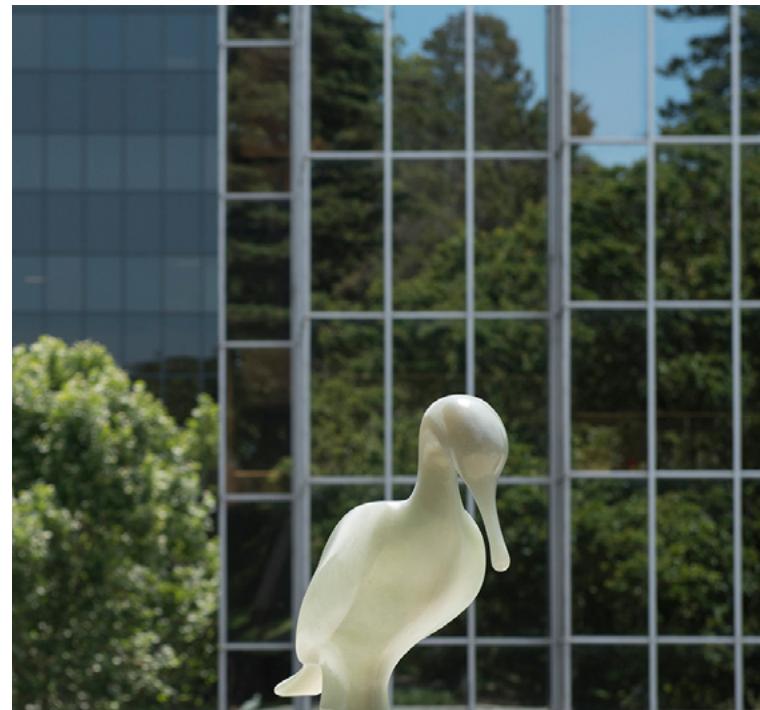
<sup>6</sup> Petra Lange-Berndt, Keynote Lecture 'The Natural History Complex' ART/NATURE Conference Berlin, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNRH8Im1Gpo>, accessed 2 November 2019.

<sup>7</sup> van Dooren, *Flight Ways*, p 5.

<sup>8</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p 1.



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*Morning dew* (installation view), 2019  
Cast resin with heat-pressed and dried plant material  
Sound installation by Antonia Barnett-McIntosh  
Enjoy Contemporary Art Space, Wellington



*Morning dew* (installation view), 2019  
Cast resin with heat-pressed and dried plant material  
Sound installation by Antonia Barnett-McIntosh  
Photograph by Cheska Brown



*Morning dew* (detail), 2019  
Cast resin with heat-pressed and dried plant material  
Dimensions small: 50 x 50 x 50 mm each  
Photograph by Cheska Brown



*Morning dew (detail)*, 2019  
Cast resin with heat-pressed and dried plant material  
Dimensions large: 60 x 60 x 30 mm each  
Photograph by Cheska Brown



*Offspring of Rain* (installation view), 2019

Plexiglass, epoxy resin, digital video 10:00 min

Sound by Antonia Barnett-McIntosh

Photograph by Cheska Brown



*Offspring of Rain* (installation view), 2019  
Plexiglass, epoxy resin, digital video 10:00 min  
Sound by Antonia Barnett-McIntosh  
Enjoy Contemporary Art Space

**Sounding out feeling in Offspring of Rain:  
Sorawit Songsataya & Antonia Barnett-McIntosh at Enjoy**

In his book *Crowds and Power* (1960), which I come to through Gwyneth Porter, Elias Canetti describes rain as a crowd symbol, a natural phenomenon that summons the energy of a crowd and transforms it into myth, dream, speech and sound.<sup>1</sup> For Canetti, the motion of rain is intrinsically linked to its magical qualities. He writes, “*rain falls in drops...it is seen as parallel streaks and the number of the falling drops emphasises the uniformity of their direction. There is no movement which makes more impression on man than that of falling... three senses at least— sight, hearing and touch— participate in the experience of rain, and to all these senses it is something multiple.*”<sup>2</sup> Sorawit Songsataya’s exhibition *Offspring of rain*, at Enjoy Contemporary Art Space, has shared concerns with Canetti’s conception of rainfall. *Offspring of rain* presents sculptural components, moving image, and original composition in order to imagine how an encounter with the natural world can return to being something intimate. The show is the result of Songsataya’s research at the Mākara West Wind Farm. The moving image work *Offspring of Rain* — which also lends the exhibition its title — most explicitly illuminates Songsataya’s unravelling and reinterpretation of natural experience.

In the Western world, the everyday encounter with nature is usually mediated by technology, science and commerce. When the forecast is for rain, the symbol on the iPhone weather application seems to perfectly condense the mood that it brings. The weight of the rain cloud is heavy, bearing the load of an afternoon of precipitation. The chilly blue registers the driving force of the rain, carried by the wind, the way it stings cheeks, that it’s rarely misty or drop-like, but falls as sheets, dashes of water jetting in from the sky. The kind of rain that is illustrated by this symbol is conscious of the way the human day can be altered or transformed by the weather. The endearing quality of these tiny graphics reinstates the phenomenological dimension of the weather. I think about how the combination of weather and graphics can offer a gateway into understanding the way that Songsataya’s practice traverses documentation and animation.

*Offspring of rain* begins with a small and chubby globe, bobbing up and down on the screen. The animated world falls, like a rain drop, into a similarly simply rendered pair of outstretched hands. Wobbling between cartoon fingers, Songsataya imagines Earth as liquid and malleable. The globe turns into a crystalline sphere, water to ice, and then its form changes again, to a pronged star, and to a crescent. In Gayatri Spivak’s book *Death of a Discipline* (2003), she writes that the conception of the world as a globe is way of insisting on our difference from the place where we live. Instead, Spivak proposes, Earth should be conceived of as a planet, and its population as planetary subjects. It is in this understanding of Earth that it becomes possible to reject an anthropocentric understanding of existence.<sup>3</sup> The exchange that takes place in this fragment of animation — between earth, human, liquid and ice — realises Spivak’s proposition that the world and humankind are not separate entities. The playful nature of Songsataya’s animations are central to their critique of human exploitation of the natural environment.

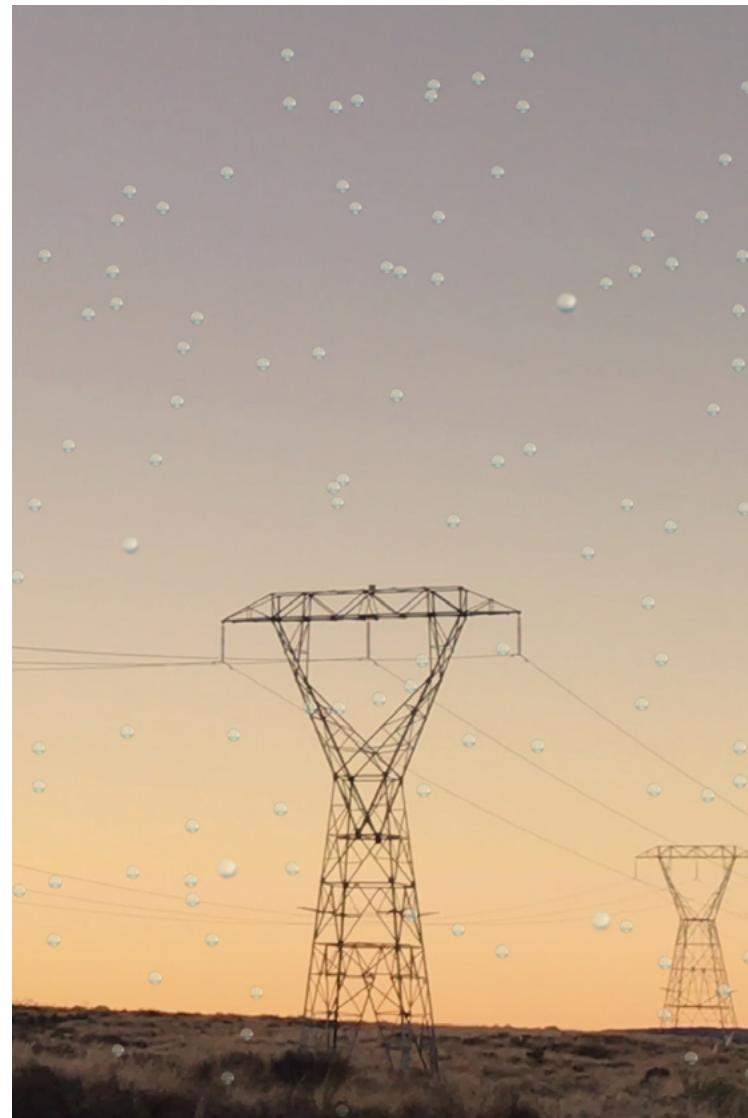
The moving image changes to a camera tracking through a rural landscape in Aotearoa, filmed from a car. Rows of pylons puncture the landscape. These industrial interventions into the landscape recall something of Edweard Muybridge’s sickened sublime. The sublime has always been a way to insist on a state of alterity from the geographies we

inhabit. However, unlike Burtynsky's work, *Offspring of rain* allows for a synergy with the natural world. In the backdrop of the video, Songsataya has studded the sky with Pixar-like stars. These animated stars disturb any effect of the Industrial Sublime, by realising that to be planetary, in Spivak's sense, is to be of stars and space too. They acknowledge the scientific transformation that has been enacted on the weather — harnessing, tracking, measuring, recording — by pointing to an alternative mode of perception. Rainfall has become about what can be extracted from it, rather than an admiration of cycles of condensation and evaporation.

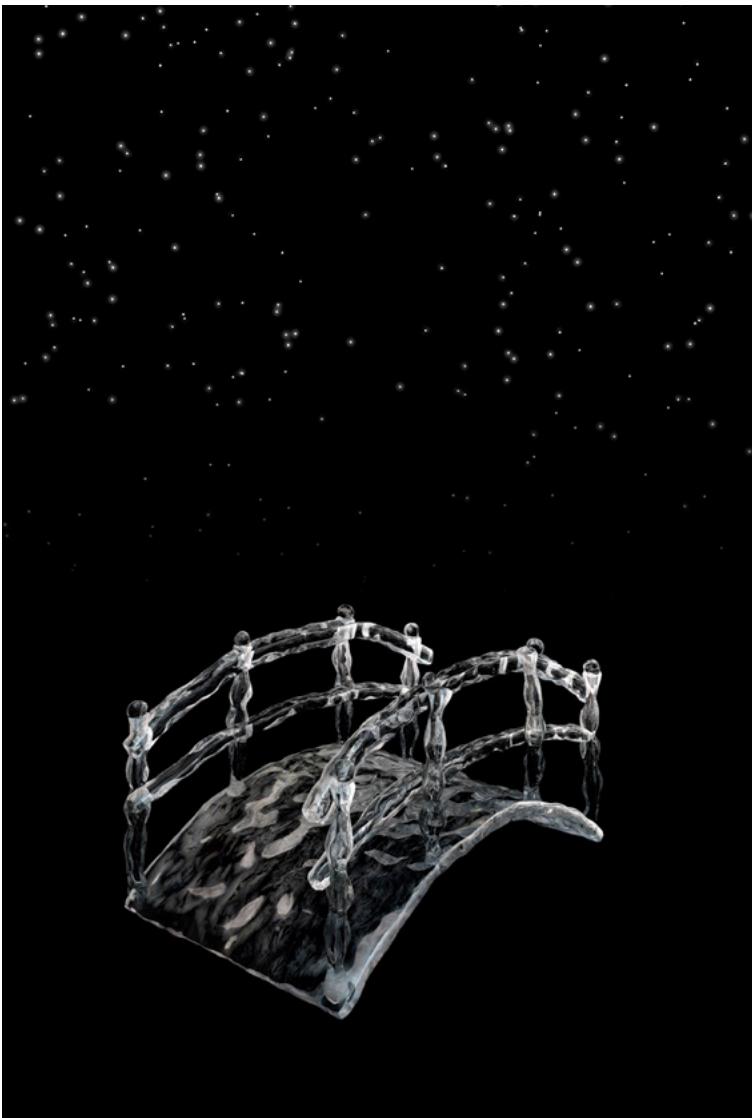
As with the wind turbines of Mākara Wind Farm that Songsataya has also recorded, these industrial inclusions charge *Offspring of rain* with the politics of harnessing the weather as an energy source. Mākara's Wind Farm is operated by Meridian Energy, the largest provider of electricity in Aotearoa. The notion of "farming" the weather draws attention to the cultivation of the environment that is necessary for such procedures to take place. Meridian Energy's installation of wind turbines is another instance of the built environment encroaching on the natural world. It is difficult, if not impossible, to separate this activity from the ways in which colonisation is ongoing. However, in contemporary discourse, particularly from a Pākehā perspective, the conversations about colonisation focus on the physical land, but ignore how colonial dominance of Aotearoa seeps into every dimension of the environment. Meridian Energy has not only claimed the land area that their wind turbines have been planted on, but assert a mastery of the sky space too. As such, Songsataya's focus on weather activity emphasises that the colonial Western mindset is predicated on ownership of any and all natural resources at hand.

Superficially, this harvesting of natural events appears primarily as a commercial endeavour, whereby the weather is a commodity that can be sold back to consumers to power their homes and lives. Yet, with the crowd as a vehicle for ideas, *Offspring of rain* also suggests that this type of natural exploitation is about more than the literal energy that water and wind provide. Instead, to collect and resell the weather does not only regard functional resources, but also ownership and distribution of the abstract qualities of meteorology. To return to Canetti, he writes that rain is the "*crowd in the moment of discharge... the drops fall because they can keep together no longer.*"<sup>4</sup> Falling rain is a moment of energy transferral, and so, analogously, it represents the moment where a crowd becomes a unified whole. Throughout *Offspring of rain*, the properties of a crowd are present, perhaps most pertinently in Songsataya's inclusion of Antonia Barnett-McIntosh's composition.

As the exhibition text notes, the Mākara Wind Farm has historically been a site for receiving and transmitting sound, in its capacity as Mākara Radio during the second half of the 20th century. The acoustics of weather are essential to a human experience of it, so it is fitting that at this location, cultivation of both weather and sound intersect. For *Offspring of rain*, Antonia Barnett-McIntosh composed an original score to accompany Songsataya's moving image. The composition weaves through the space, a vaporous audio lingering in the visitor's passage. To introduce the sound of rainfall into the exhibition, Songsataya and Barnett-McIntosh have recognised that it is unnecessary to replicate its rhythm — that instead, acoustics can be transposed. The score is tinkling and rattly and cold. The motion of weather patterns is present through its nebulous and experimental texture. Here, in the score, is where the falling happens. These moments,



*Offspring of Rain* (still), 2019  
Digital video, 10:00 min  
Sound by Antonia Barnett-McIntosh  
<https://youtu.be/IPxqRg3F7PU>



*Offspring of Rain* (still), 2019  
Digital video, 10:00 min  
Sound by Antonia Barnett-McIntosh  
<https://youtu.be/lPxqRg3F7PU>

where the audio crescendoes, but in a hazy way, are echoed in the sculptural panes of resin that sit alongside the screen. The resin is cracked, and so together, this element and Barnett-McIntosh's composition are able to signal to rainfall without being didactic. To go beyond rain as well, to think of the percussion wind enacts through foliage, or the absorbing silence of a snow blanket, sonic experiences of weather phenomena are encompassing. Rain falling heavily sounds a lot like the indiscernible and accumulated murmur of a crowd, and subsequently, being enveloped by something aural is a reminder of communality.

What of the crowd? A crowd formation establishes some commonality between everyone present. The crowd is a unifying force, at least insofar as it establishes some sort of connection between people by virtue of them existing together, in a shared space and time. The basic configuration of the crowd and its simple criteria of presence serves to eliminate or obscure difference between members or participants. As such, to summon the crowd is also to summon the concept of crowding out, of pushing away and flattening difference by taking up more space than is granted to any individual. Entering *Offspring of rain*, a grid of golf ball-sized resin spheres is arranged. Each sphere contains a unique piece of flora: some preserve pansies from Songsataya's garden, others comprise ferns gathered during research. The area that this element of the exhibition takes up forces the visitor to the edges of the gallery, toward the walls. The amassed effect of this installation, *Morning Dew*, is greater than the sum of its parts. When *Offspring of rain* and *Morning dew* (2019) are experienced simultaneously, the effect of being encompassed, crowded out, works in two ways. Firstly, the omnipresence of the composition qualifies sound as a site of refuge. The visitor can navigate the space, undetected, because their movement is always overwritten by the audio activity around them. Secondly, this anonymity, which can only breed within a crowd, enacts a radical invisibility within *Offspring of rain*. It destabilises the authority of physical existence in favour of sensation. To be invisible in a crowd is to forfeit the physical body to a greater structure, and prioritises the personal, inner and perceptive experience.

Jane Wallace

<sup>1</sup> Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, as cited in Gwyneth Porter, "Rosemary Johnson's Cloud Works (1975-76): The Opposite of Neglect," *Natural Selection* 7 (Winter 2010): 21.1, accessed 27 December 2018, [https://www.naturalselection.org.nz/s/7.21\\_Gwyn\\_Porter.pdf](https://www.naturalselection.org.nz/s/7.21_Gwyn_Porter.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 82.

<sup>3</sup> Gayatri Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2005), 72-3.

<sup>4</sup> Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 82.

*Sounding out feeling in Offspring of Rain: Sorawit Songsataya & Antonia Barnett-McIntosh at Enjoy*, an essay by Jane Wallace. Commissioned by CIRCUIT Artist Film and Video Aotearoa New Zealand 2019.



*Jupiter* (installation view), 2019  
Six-channels digital video, 7:17 min  
copper, wool fibre, silk, pressed flowers, jute twine  
Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery



*Jupiter* (details), 2019  
copper, wool fibre, silk, pressed flowers, jute twine  
Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery  
Photograph by Sam Hartnett



*Jupiter* (detail), 2019  
Six-channels digital video, 7:17 min  
copper, wool fibre, silk, pressed flowers, jute twine  
<https://youtu.be/KGpzqylSSw>

### Jupiter

In the exhibition *Jupiter*, Sorawit Songsataya draws us towards the horizon, an in-between space that binds, yet remains neither land or sky. Operating in this liminal zone, and animated by the unseen forces of wind, he uses the humble form of Thai kite to bring together an oscillating range of references, connecting local traditions with a grander social fabric; the handmade with the digital; land with clouds.

Uniting conventionally perceived binaries, *Jupiter* helps us envision the multiple worlds that traverse traditional boundaries. A series of videos capture a kite-flying festival in Thailand, interspersed with computer-generated animation. They play alongside kite-objects crafted from New Zealand wool, Thai silk, and dried petals. The juxtaposition of moving image works and objects places each into co-dependence; the kite propels the fun of a festival and the creativeness of digital making just as the kite also relies on these conditions for flight – realised, digital or latent. A further set of moving image sequences presents footage of wind turbines and coloured fluorescent windmills, revelling in the interplay between visible human agency, and that which both enables and exceeds it.

*Jupiter* suggests a collaboration between human and non-human forces, each contributing with varying intentions. In mapping the multiple connections that emerge from a single object, Songsataya places the very notion of singularity under pressure. Rather, the artist playfully exposes a false divide between human and non-human, agency and happy accident.

Ioana Gordon-Smith

Post-McMahon House Residency Exhibition  
23 February – 26 May 2019  
Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery



*Jupiter* (details), 2019  
copper, wool fibre, pressed flowers, jute twine  
Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery  
Photograph by Sam Hartnett



*A Chair that Jumps Like a Deer* (still), 2018

Digital video, 5:59 min

IASPIS Konstnärsnämnden, Stockholm

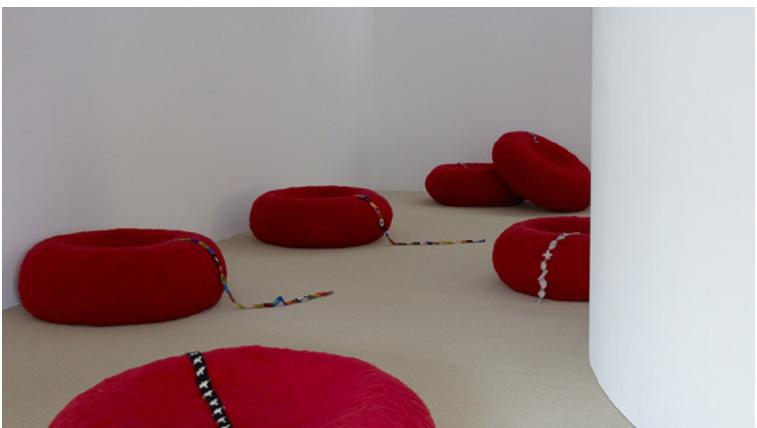
<https://youtu.be/JpEcrJWW7kY>



*Starling* (installation view), 2018  
Digital video 7:03 min, merino wool, polystyrene, carpet  
Artspace Aotearoa. Photograph by Sam Hartnett  
<https://youtu.be/SJotGKYvHUo>



*Starling* (installation view), 2018  
Digital video 7:03 min, merino wool, polystyrene, carpet  
Artspace Aotearoa. Photograph by Sam Hartnett  
<https://youtu.be/SJotGKYvHUo>



*Lovebirds* (still), 2018. Digital video, 7:03 min  
<https://youtu.be/SJotGKYvHUo>

*Four Chambers*, 2018. Wool and Polystyrene, 1200 x 1200 x 400 mm each  
Part of *Starling*, Artspace Aotearoa, Auckland

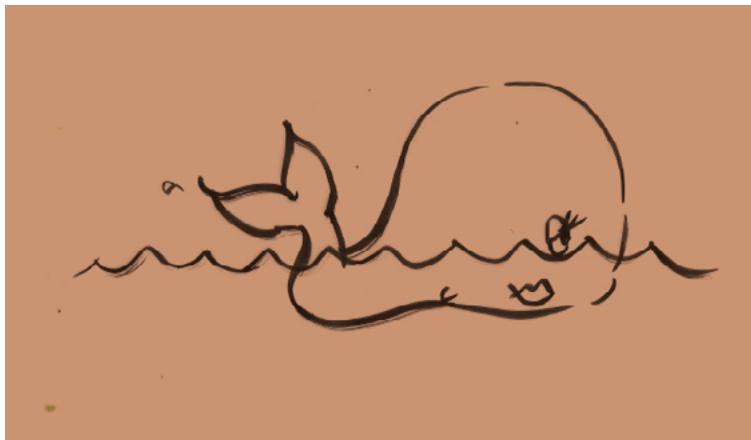
### Starling

Kinship by birth or blood is the primary means through which an individual understands their place and sense of belonging. Kinship as defined by the family unit – blood as the material of commonality – is a primal medium of connection, one that can symbolically order our earliest notions of relation. However, relying on what is contained by bodies in close containment, these models of kinship restrict notions of belonging. They are closed systems that prioritise linear human-to-human relations above all else. *Starling* refigures behaviours found within the human body and more-than-human-worlds to offer an approach to kinship emergent from the collaborative, symbiotic patterns of biological organisms and complex ecologies. *Starling* images a world stripped of human centrality, a world composed of nonlinear relations.

With the blood cell as one principal actor, Songsataya utilises scale as an entry point into this relationality. Animate blood cells position us within a microcosmic view of our own bodily processes. In this positioning, we might become aware of the potential subjecthood of these processes and their actors. They also provide a platform – a language even – which helps to understand our embeddedness within complex, universal processes. It enables us to view ourselves as a set of ‘systems’ within systems, existing in a state of continual commune and collaboration. By picturing the agency of what is most often understood as “not alive” we may begin to access our relational and emerging composition from the perspective of the environment within us, and us within the environment.

The woolly, membranous blood cells around us appear intimately familiar, yet normally only known through the lens of a microscope. Hand-felted ribbon chains are draped over the blood cells, mimicking the language of genetic coding, a twist towards more ancient lines of connectivity, genealogy and the order of humankind in the world. At once enlarging and abstracting biological forms and processes, Songsataya renders affinity with “the stuff of us”, the materials and bodies that are our most immediate collaborators. Informed by studies of multi-species biological patterns – how living organisms interact as open systems – the exhibition’s structure and collaborative process attempt the qualities of these highly adaptive networks. It looks at such systems as a means of permeating self-understanding and creative processes. Co-authorship, or thinking-making-practicing collectively, is tested in order to tease out the question, “is singularity naturally collaborative?”

*non-hyphenated*, a non-linear, multi-platform work authored by Robyn Maree Pickens, is partly modelled on Stacy Alaimo’s transcorporeal idea that “the environment’ is not located somewhere out there, but is always the very substance of ourselves”<sup>1</sup>. The work, a series of writings, explores the innate interconnectivity of all beings. A set of five micro-texts, each published across different mediums (within the pages of *Art News New Zealand*, as street posters, through Instagram, as a specially designed website, and in print within the gallery) staggered throughout the exhibitions length, to be read as a cohesive whole, or in parts. *non-hyphenated* is a textual system that allows for the context of each microtext to infect and permeate the others, establishing a collaborative generation of meaning. Similarly positioned is the reader, who – perhaps encountering a microtext in isolation – brings certain gaps and rhythms that can be accounted for by the text’s embrace of the generative.



*Lovebirds* (stills), 2018  
Digital video, 7:03 min  
Part of *Starling*, Artspace Aotearoa, Auckland  
<https://youtu.be/SJotGKYvHUo>

Set amongst this understanding of self-as-ecology and ecology-as-self, *Starling* works towards imagining a kind of boundless subjecthood composed by collective kinship. Traditional and orienting divisions collapse into a holistic ecology: symbolic to material, subject to object, us to world, it to me to they.

Such holistic conceptions of the world are not new: The artist honours this directly with the work *Lovebirds*, and its reflection on the story of the whale and Kauri tree. Indigenous notions of kinship very often encompass a binding relationship between all organisms; human, animal or otherwise. In this whakatauākī (of which the origin is unknown) the whale and the kauri are placed in a reciprocal relationship. The whale longs for the Kauri to return to the sea, but the Kauri must stay earthbound and guard the forest. They decide to exchange skins, each giving a part of themselves to form the other, explaining why the Kauri bark is so fleshy, and dense with oily resin. This mutual exchange takes on a variety of forms in *Lovebirds* as it moves through a cast of actors and scenes.

Blood is central to *Starling*, used to suggest the limits of its human lore. In bearing witness to and participating in a network of interacting systems, entities, and materials, the attitude of making kin with the world as a political act emerges through the exhibition: a kinship of love without blood, premised on the fundamental connectivity of the world. This more-than-human image of kinship becomes an ode to ‘love processes’: mundane exchanges of flows, energies, and encounters between every conceivable entity. Looking to our world as an ecology in which no “material expression of it is hierarchised above another”<sup>2</sup>, gives us the opportunity to re-examine and rewrite the agency of human and nonhuman actants alike, to understand the collective processes making up the world, and to increase our capacity to make kin with the world.

Bridget Riggir-Cuddy

<sup>1</sup> Alaimo, Stacy. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the material Self*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010, pg 4.

<sup>2</sup> Rākete, Emilie. *Inhuman: Parasites, Posthumanism, and papatūānuku*, 2015.



Weave Me In felting workshop, 2018  
Merino wool, felting needles, polyurethane, printed booklet  
Part of *Starling*, Artspace Aotearoa, Auckland  
Photograph by Sam Hartnett



*Sad*, 2017

3D printed plastic vase 80 x 77 x 270 mm, pine, brass

Part of *Acting Out* curated by Stephen Cleland

Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi

## Acting Out

Through a simple strategy of juxtaposition, Austrian artist Oliver Laric, in his untitled 2015 two-channel video lays bare the extent to which Walt Disney famously recycled animations from film to film. Viewed side by side it is clear that the movement for 'Cheshire Cat' in *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) is identical to 'Kaa the Snake' from *The Jungle Book* (1967). 'Baloo the Bear's' facial expressions from *The Jungle Book* are then duplicated in a near identical bear—this time 'Little John'—set in the world of *Robin Hood* (1973), and so on. Through seeking out an economical means to recycle human movement, originally culled through painstaking stop-motion studies of people performing actions, Disney swiftly recreated various animated characters with distinctly anthropomorphic movements and expressions: from a complex dance to a tumble and fall, or facial expressions such as a grin, a frown or a kiss.

In a like manner Auckland artist Sorawit Songsataya's work has the tendency to cut, paste and recycle highly tuned emotions. Songsataya's animated vases transition between different states with ease. Still captures of his 'actors' set within a dark scene were developed for the promotional material for *Acting Out*. Then the same distinctive frowning vase reappears in the exhibition as a 3D-printed object simply titled *Sad*, carefully perched on a log. In other works, these vases are reanimated as moving images rendered with the same attention to surface and shadow now translated into the video medium. But in direct opposition to Disney's narrative structures, where the characters traditionally emphasised normative heterosexual modes of being, the slippery way by which Songsataya's characters shift between different mediums, sites and contexts is a decisive strategy in his work to emphasise the instability of gender roles.

In this way Songsataya's work has been connected with queer aesthetics. His *Good Kissers* now featured in *Acting Out* made an earlier appearance in the 2016 National Contemporary Art Award at Waikato Museum. While the shapes are identical, the previous pair featured tattoos on their lower backs of *My Little Pony* animated characters, seen kissing passionately with love hearts floating above. As the source inspiration for the sculpture, Songsataya's interest in these characters is the inherently less-defined gender of the ponies. Like these animated characters his own vases are sexless: their identity is therefore fluid and highly subject to change according to the circumstances in which we encounter them. Their exaggerated emotions suggest a playful separation between one's sex, the performance of gender and the actual experience of feelings.

The way Songsataya's work embraces a culture of explicit cutting and pasting has been connected with post-internet aesthetics. But as opposed to his contemporaries, for whom the means of gratuitous borrowing of often eclectic content shadows the way we encounter information online, Songsataya's work is also increasingly invested in materials which involve traditional crafted processes. In these works the particle plastic deployed in fabricating the sculptures is contrasted with hand-woven wool-covered stands, a readymade log and a carefully balanced swing made from thick acrylic and rope. It's also no mistake that an icon of craft – the vase – is his chosen vessel for communication, which suggests that his work will continue to draw from both art and craft, while spanning processes from our contemporary moment and the distant past.

Stephen Cleland, April 2017. Published by the Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi at Victoria University of Wellington, to accompany the exhibition: *Acting Out*, 6 May – 9 July 2017



*Hugging*, 2017  
3D printed plastic vases 230 x 190 x 200 mm  
plexiglass 750 x 250 x 40 mm, manila rope  
Photograph by Shaun Matthews



*Good Kissers*, 2017

3D printed plastic vases, 73 x 10 x 200 mm each  
custom stand: hand-felted wool, magnolia; 400 x 400 x 1650 mm  
Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi. Photograph by Shaun Matthews

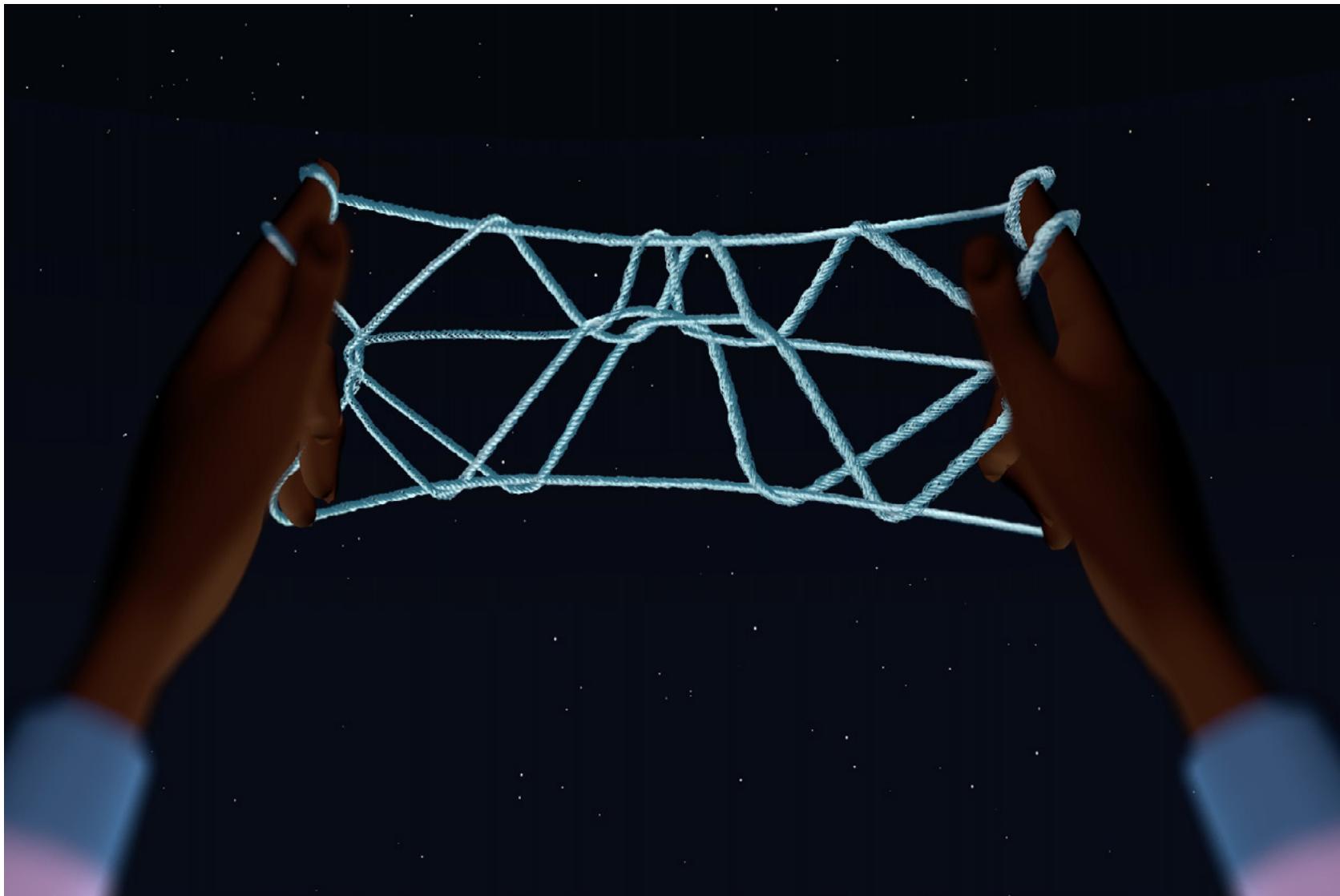


*Coyotes Running Opposite Ways* (installation view), 2016

Part of *Potentially Yours, The Coming Community*

Artspace Aotearoa, curated by Tendai John Mutambu

Photograph by Sam Hartnett



*Coyotes Running Opposite Ways* (still), 2016

Digital video, 4:58 min

Part of *Potentially Yours, The Coming Community*

<https://youtu.be/H5JV6mytl9c>



*Coyotes Running Opposite Ways (detail)*, 2016  
Glazed ceramics, magnolia branches, custom made pine wood deck, machine-felted wool fibre,  
machine-knitted mohair textile, copper wire, wool string, coloured fluorescent lighting  
Part of *Potentially Yours, The Coming Community*, Artspace Aotearoa



*Coyotes Running Opposite Ways* (detail), 2016  
machine-felted wool fibre, 90 x 1500 mm each  
Part of *Potentially Yours, The Coming Community*  
Artspace Aotearoa, curated by Tendai John Mutambu



*Keeping You in the Loop: Maui's Clever String Game* workshop  
Part of Potentially Yours, *The Coming Community* public programme  
Organised between Rebecca Hobbs, SOUL Project;  
Salome Tanuvasa and the artist, Ihumātao, 2016



*Good Kisser*, 2016

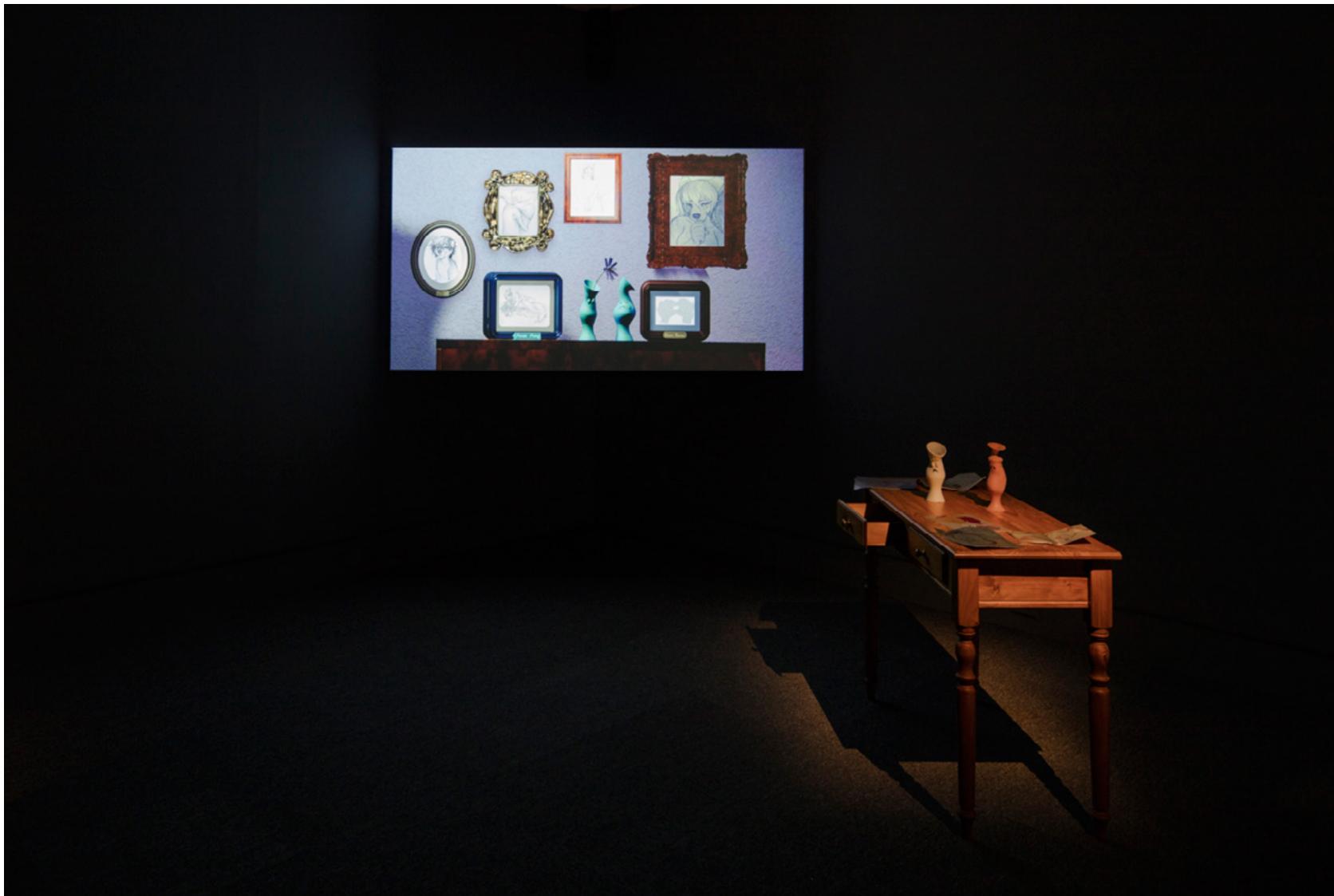
3D printed plastic particle, 73 x 10 x 200 mm

found wooden plant-stand, 250 x 250 x 1200 mm

National Contemporary Art Award, Waikato Museum Te Whare Taonga o Waikato



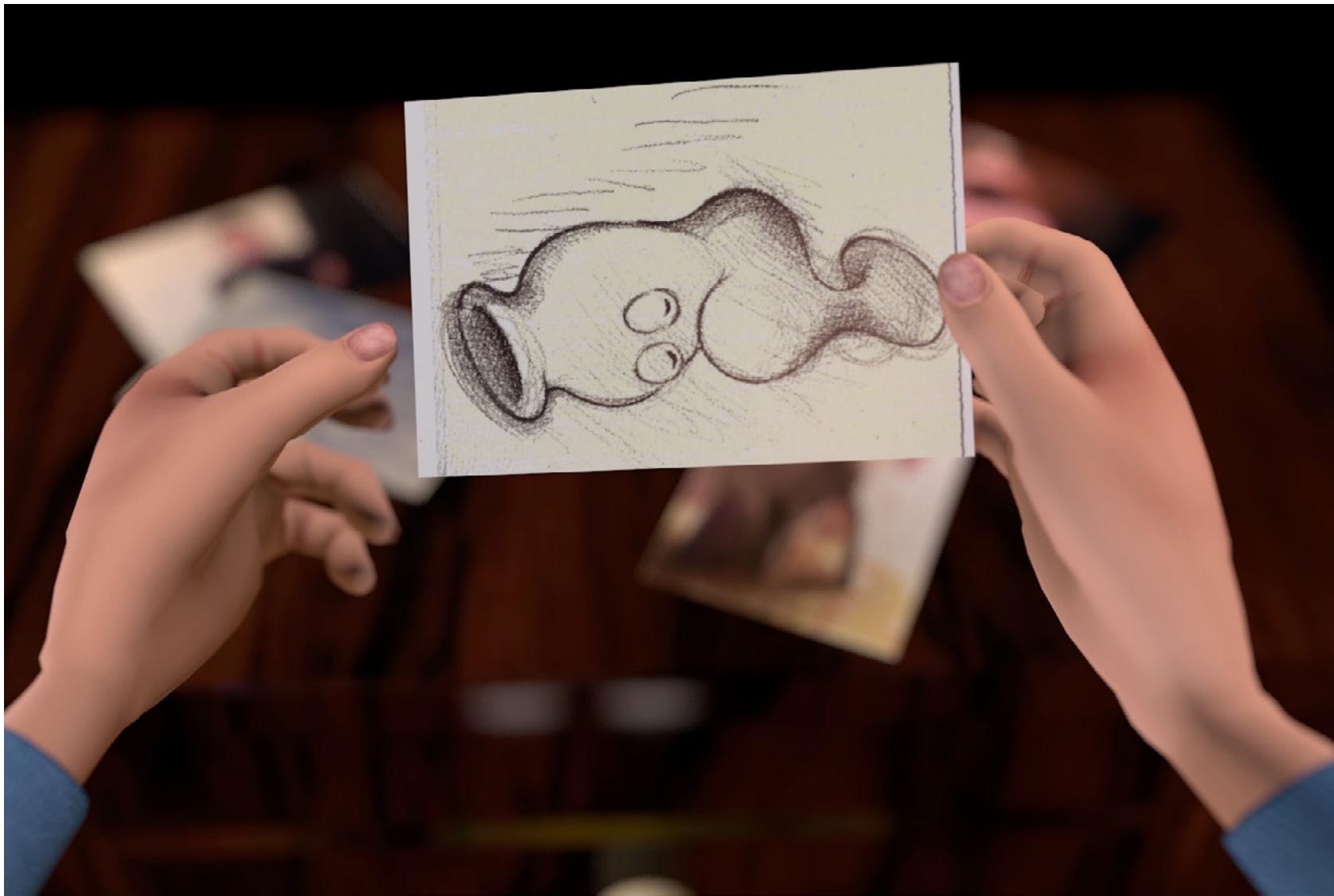
*A bone, a flesh, a daddy's nest*, 2016  
Digital video, colour, silent, 3:07 min  
RM Gallery, Auckland  
<https://youtu.be/QyYQ5qNAmTo>



*Bronies* (installation view), 2016  
Part of *The Non-Living Agent* curated by Andrew Kennedy  
Te Tuhi Contemporary Art  
Photograph by Sam Hartnett



*Bronies* (detail), 2016  
3D printed vases, antiqued wooden hall table,  
inkjet print on aluminum. Dimensions variable  
Photograph by Sam Hartnett



Bronies (still), 2016  
Digital animation, colour, sound, 3:13 min  
Part of *The Non-Living Agent* curated by Andrew Kennedy  
<https://youtu.be/DsVAL-ApJnM>



*Afternoon Pick* (installation view), 2015

Digital video, colour, sound, 4:57 min

*The Dairy Project* curated by Rebecca Boswell

<https://vimeo.com/155265046>



*Tip Top* (installation view), 2015  
Inkjet printed on silk charmeuse, nylon rope  
*The Dairy Project* curated by Rebecca Boswell  
The Physics Room, Christchurch



*Midnight* (installation view), 2015  
Digital video 2:21 min (loop), terracotta, pyrography on balsa sheet,  
machine-knitted denim textiles, wrought iron racks  
Window Gallery, Auckland. Photograph by Sam Hartnett



*Midnight* (detail), 2015  
Machine-knitted cotton denim, digital embroidery,  
wrought iron rack. Dimensions variable  
Window Gallery, Auckland



*Midnight* (still), 2015  
Digital animation, colour, silent, 2:21 min  
<https://vimeo.com/132595496>  
Window Gallery, Auckland



*Bishop*, 2015. 3D printed vase, 70 x 70 x 200 mm  
*Cardinal*, 2015. Machine-knitted and digital embroidery;  
merino wool, polyamide, acrylic, viscose, polyester, rayon  
*Let the Cobbler Stick to His Last* curated by Tim Gentle and Matthew Ward, New York



*Piti School Uniforms*, 2015  
machine-knitted merino wool, pine coat hanger  
Blue Oyster Art Projectspace, Dunedin



*Southland Carpenters*, 2015  
3D printed plastic particle, 70 x 150 mm  
wooden vase stand, 270 x 1050 mm  
Blue Oyster Art Projectspace, Dunedin



*Dolly*, 2013  
Digital video, colour, silent, 5:03 min  
[https://youtu.be/mehW\\_F0TsBk](https://youtu.be/mehW_F0TsBk)  
Gloria Knight Gallery, Auckland

**SORAWIT SONGSATAYA**

Born Chiang Mai, Thailand. Lives and works in New Zealand

**Education**

- 2013 Master of Fine Arts (First Class Honours), Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland  
2012 Postgraduate Diploma in Fine Arts, the University of Auckland  
2010 Bachelor of Design (Visual Communication), Unitec Institute of Technology

**Awards and Residencies**

- 2019 Enjoy Summer Residency, Rita Angus Cottage, Wellington  
2018 MASS Alexandria Guest Artist, Alexandria, Egypt  
2018 Iaspis Studio Residency, Stockholm, Sweden  
2018 McCahon House artist residency, Auckland, New Zealand  
2016 National Contemporary Art Award (First Prize Winner), New Zealand  
2013 New Graduates Award (First Prize Winner), University of Auckland

**Selected Exhibitions**

- 2019  
*The Interior* (solo), curated by Natasha Conland, Auckland Art Gallery Sculpture Terrace  
*Offspring of Rain* (solo), Enjoy Contemporary Art Space, Wellington  
*hippies use the side door to enter the bazaar* (group), Critical Path, Sydney  
*Jupiter* (solo), Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery, Auckland
- 2018  
*Atropelos* (group), organised by Luiza Prado and Daniel Rourke, arebyte gallery, London  
*Art and Shop* (group), organised by Hanna Nordell, Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm  
*Step-sister* (solo), curated by Matt Hansen and Mohamed Almusibli, Mikro, Zürich  
*<Bright Cave>* (group), curated by Robyn Maree Pickens, Blue Oyster Art Project Space  
*Soon Enough: Art in Action*, curated by Maria Lind, Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm  
*Starling* (solo), Artspace Aotearoa, Auckland

**2017**

- Cabinets of Curiosities* (solo), Papakura Art Gallery, Auckland  
*Acting Out* (group), curated by Stephen Cleland, Adam Art Gallery, Wellington  
*Dark Objects* (group), curated by Faith Wilson, The Dowse Art Museum, Wellington  
*A Room of Our Own* (group), curated by Rachel Duval, Terror Management, Auckland  
*I hate you, I hate you* (group), organized by Adnan Misal Yildiz, Michael Lett Gallery

**2016**

- Potentially Yours: The Coming Community* (group), curated by Tendai John Mutambu, Artspace Aotearoa, Auckland  
*National Contemporary Art Awards* (group), Waikato Museum, Hamilton  
*A bone, a flesh, a daddy's nest* (duo), RM Gallery, Auckland  
*The Non-living Agent* (group), curated by Andrew Kennedy, Te Tuhi Contemporary Art Ditch (group), curated by Ophelia King, Knulps Gallery, Sydney  
*Merry Weather* (duo), Bowerbank Ninow gallery, Auckland

#### 2015

*The Dairy Project* (duo) curated by Rebecca Boswell, The Physics Room, Christchurch  
*Midnight* (solo), Window Onsite, Auckland University, Auckland  
*Cobalt Sun* (solo), Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery window space, Auckland  
*Let The Cobbler Stick To His Last* (group), curated by Tim Gentles and Matthew Ward, New York  
*Piti Montessori* (duo), Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Dunedin

#### 2014

*Locating the Practice: Circuit Critical Forum* (duo), Elamprojects, Auckland  
*Black Market* (group), collaborative video project for Window Online  
*Unstuck in Time* (group) curated by Bruce E. Phillips, Te Tuhi Contemporary Art  
*Glaister Ennor Graduate Art Awards* (group), Sanderson Contemporary Gallery  
*Retail* (group), exhibition at Fuzzy Vibes gallery, Auckland  
*Everyday Backwash* (group), curated by Henry Davidson, Michael Lett, Auckland  
*Campaign Furniture* (group), curated by Henry Davidson, Dunedin Public Art Gallery

#### Public Screening

2018	<i>Recent Video Art From Aotearoa New Zealand</i> , Studio Kura, Itoshima, Japan
2018	<i>Iaspis Open Studio</i> , IASPIS, Stockholm, Sweden
2016	<i>Labor Zero Labor</i> , curated by Caterina Riva for Benjamin Valenza in collaboration with Triangle France
2015	<i>Circuit Artists</i> , Rotterdam Film Festival, Goethe Institut, Rotterdam
2014	<i>Artist's Cinema</i> , Circuit Artist Film And Video Aotearoa, AUT University <i>Artist's Cinema</i> , Circuit Artist Film And Video Aotearoa, Wintec Institute

#### Collective Projects

2017	<i>Hapori Volume 6: Rabbit on the Moon</i> by Wai Chiang, Olivia Hong, Darryl Chin, Auckland
	<i>Hapori Volume 5: community</i> by Olivia Blyth, Corban Estate Arts Centre
	<i>Hapori</i> publication workshop, Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Wellington
2016	<i>Hapori Volume 4: Waltzing Macabre</i> by Tom Tuke and Ronan Lee, Auckland
	<i>Hapori Volume 3: anti-heroine</i> by Anna Rankin, Auckland Women Center
2015	<i>Hapori Volume 2: little metonym</i> by Robin Murphy, Auckland CBD
	<i>Hapori Volume 1: Dead to the World</i> by Bridget Riggir, Auckland

#### Design and Publication

2017	3D animation for artist Juliet Carpenter, the Chartwell Show <i>Shout Whisper Wail!</i> , Auckland Art Gallery
2016	<i>Keeping You in the Loop: Te Whai Wawewawe a Maui 'Maui's Clever String Game</i> , Artspace Aotearoa Education Programme Animated-GIFs for an online essay by Emilie Rākete organised by Bridget Riggir-Cuddy
	3D modeled a replicate of Jean Arp sculpture for Oscar Enberg
2015	<i>Hapori Volume 3: Anti-heroine</i> , Auckland Animated flower for <i>Summer of Supine</i> video by artist Juliet Carpenter

- 2014 Press image and video trailer for *The Shadow of the Dome of Pleasure*  
 Promotion material for Ben Clement exhibition *SEEDER*, Blue Oyster Gallery  
 Animated a 3D Polaroid for *Half Bianca* video by artist Juliet Carpenter  
*Interview*, Magazine Issue 3, Auckland
- 2013 Tahi Moore *AUTONOIR* exhibition poster, Artspace, Auckland  
*A Jaw for an Eye (or two)*, ISON magazine#4, Auckland  
*Tangential Structures*, Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Wellington  
*Claude Lévi-Strauss*, ISON magazine#2, Auckland
- 2012 Julia Moritz public program poster, Artspace, Auckland  
 Yona Lee public talk poster, Artspace, Auckland  
*He ran, he walked, he ran, he walked* publication, George Fraser Gallery

#### Selected Bibliography and Press

- 2019 *Pearly dewdrops drop*, Charlotte Forrester, Enjoy Exhibition Essays  
*Sounding out feeling in Offspring of Rain: Sorawit Songsataya & Antonia Barnett-McIntosh at Enjoy*, Jane Wallace, Circuit Artist Film and Video Aotearoa New Zealand  
*Songsataya at Te Uru*, John Hurrell, EyeContact  
*Planetary Wind*, Bridget Riggir-Cuddy, Post McCahon House Residency
- 2018 *Starling by Sorawit Songsataya*, Rebecca Boswell, Matter 8  
*The exhibition as ecosystem*, Elle Loui August, Art News New Zealand, Winter 2018  
*Art Seen: May 24*, James Dignan, Otago Daily Times  
*Sorawit Songsataya: Starling*, Lucinda Bennett, Art and Australia, Summer 2018  
*One Mind: A Multitude of Bodies*, John Hurrell, EyeContact  
*The Unmissables: Four Exhibitions to see in February*, Francis McWhannell, The Pantograph Punch
- 2017 *The Human Texture*, Sue Gardiner, Art News New Zealand, Autumn 2017  
*Potentially Yours, The Coming Community exhibition review*, Edward Hanfling, Art New Zealand journal issue 161  
*Dark Objects*, Hanahiva Rose, Salient online journal, Victoria University  
*Gesturing ‘whatever’; Potentially Yours, The Coming Community*, Victoria Wynne-Jones, Circuit Artist Film and Video Aotearoa New Zealand  
*50 Things Collectors Need to Know: Award Winners*, Sue Gardiner, Australian Art Collector Magazine issue 79
- 2016 *Optimism and Possibility*, John Hurrell, EyeContact  
*My Little Pony as resistance: A review of ‘Good Kisser’*, Ellie Lee-Duncan, The Pantograph Punch  
*Mere pockets of aspiration: A review of ‘Potentially Yours, The Coming Community’*, Lana Loposi, The Pantograph Punch  
*Stop Making Sense*, Mark Amery, The Big Idea  
*Intervening Agents*, John Hurrell, EyeContact
- 2015 *Piti Montessori / Merge Nodes*, James Thomson-Bache, Blue Oyster Art Project Space Annual Publication  
*Dimensions Variable*, Simon Gennard, The Pantograph Punch  
*Black cat, night owl*, Annie Mackenzie, The Physics Room website
- 2013 *The Limits of Education*, John Hurrell, EyeContact