

Fourth in the Govett-Brewster's Break series presenting Aotearoa New Zealand artists, *Towards a Public Realm* reminds us that art exists in relation to communities. As artist Lawrence Weiner once put it, art is about we.¹ The artists featured in the exhibition, Murray Hewitt, Fiona Jack, Louise Menzies, Kate Newby, Kim Paton, and Peter Wareing, take a diverse range of approaches, yet all share an interest in our socio-political processes, structures and histories. Employing various media and strategies, this group of artists critically examine the significance of the images, language and architectural forms that surround us. Specifically, they question the relationships that bind societies together, the systems that govern them, and the role that art can play in defining these.

Whether electing to present their work in public places or within the gallery, each artist engages with their wider surroundings, suggesting their artistic practice can act as public space. If some express a cautious optimism, it is about the potential for radical individual and collective agency. Their works are gestures or propositions for social alternatives. Addressing sustainability in all its forms - environmental, economic, socio-cultural - and the imperative to support local initiatives over global conglomerates, imperial or colonial powers, *Towards a Public Realm* posits the advocacy of community spirit as not quite so twee after all.

CURATED BY MELANIE OLIVER

List of Works

- Murray Hewitt**
(Born 1969, lives and works in Wellington)
- Weeping Waters* 2007 (image 5)
Video (10 mins 15 secs)
- Untitled* 2007
Video (1 min 37 secs)
- Spin 1* 2008
Video (42 secs)
- Spin 2* 2008
Video (50 secs)
- Mementos NZ Souvenirs and Gifts,
23 Devon Street West
- Jessie's girl* 2008
Video (11 mins 10 secs)
- 21* 2008
Video (7 mins)
- Mitre 10 Mega, 5 Vickers Road,
Waiwhakaiti
- Ngati Whatua o Orakei, Fiona Jack,
New Artland and volunteers**
- Palisade* 2008 (image 1)
Photographic print, video, manuka
- Louise Menzies**
(Born 1981, lives and works in Auckland)
- Self Defence Against Falls* 2008
(image 2)
Photographic prints
- Kate Newby**
(Born 1979, lives and works in Auckland)
- Don't act all scared like before* 2008
(image 6)
Mixed media
- Louise Menzies and Kate Newby**
Thinking/willing 2008 (image 3)
Mixed media
- Kim Paton**
(Born 1979, lives and works in Raglan)
- The Wal-Mart Effect* 2008 (image 7)
Vinyl
- Peter Wareing**
(Lives and works in Taranaki and New York)
- There are snakes in paradise* 2008
(image 4)
Part 1 (25 mins)
Part 2: Footnotes (10 mins)
Part 3: Interviews
Neil Herson (46 mins)
Andrew Gibbs (35 mins)
Noel Scouller (44 mins)
Bruce Wildblood-Crawford (39 mins)

MURRAY HEWITT

FIONA JACK

LOUISE MENZIES

KATE NEWBY

KIM PATON

PETER WAREING

TOWARDS A PUBLIC REALM

6 DECEMBER 2008 - 1 FEBRUARY 2009

Murray Hewitt

With his distinct visual language, Murray Hewitt's video works contemplate consumer behaviour and natural resources, as well as the construction of New Zealand imagery and identities. Through the considered actions of a lone costumed figure or repetitive stationary camera shots that survey various brands and motifs, Hewitt's subjects are given focussed and sustained deliberation. The eerie calmness of the compositions, devoid of identifiable individuals or interactions, lends a sense of unease to our current condition.

Untitled (2007) is the slow-motion replay of an ambiguous scenario glimpsed from the window of a passing car. Against a lush pastoral landscape, a Ku Klux Klan character shoots out a stranded car, though the narrative is left to speculation.

There is a similar quietness to *Weeping Waters* (2007). Made on the centenary of spiritual and political leader Te Whiti o Rongomai's death, in this work Hewitt wears a 1970s crash helmet decorated with the Raukura symbol of the Parihaka peace movement. A sketch of endurance, *Weeping Waters* shows faith in committed action against all odds. Its coastal location makes reference to the controversial foreshore and seabed legislation regarding Māori customary title for land resources.

Attempts to define a certain national brand for New Zealand are connected to the history of New Zealand landscape painting. Situated in both the gallery and storefront window of Mementos NZ Souvenirs and Gifts, the *Spin* works (2008) feature picturesque landscapes as well as a Eugene von Guerard painting from the nineteenth century, examining the images we use to both market and represent ourselves.

Rick Springfield's pop song of lust, envy and desire is an apt opening soundtrack to Hewitt's video *Jessie's girl* (2008), a survey of Wellington petrol stations accompanied by classic hits love songs. The camera is positioned within a car, the view framed by the windscreen. As a light drizzle falls, the gas station forecourts glow alluringly and it seems the drive of commerce is under surveillance.

Also presented offsite is *21* (2008). Showcasing the glory of the Home Improvement Warehouse, while waiting at the checkout of the Waiwhakaiti Mitre 10 Mega shoppers are able to view footage of all 21 Mitre 10 Mega stores from throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

Fiona Jack and Ngati Whatua o Orakei

In May 1943 a palisade fence was built by volunteers around the Ngati Whatua o Orakei papakainga (the traditional Māori village of the Ngati Whatua people of Orakei) in Okahu Bay on Auckland's waterfront. The fence was an attempt to regain some privacy and maintain a sense of community in the face of encroaching colonial urbanisation, which was exacerbated by the construction of a major roadway through the village that separated the main living areas from the sea. Less than ten years later, the village was burnt to the ground and the inhabitants evicted without further compensation or a purchase agreement offered at that time.

In April 2008 Ngati Whatua o Orakei, Fiona Jack and New Artland organised a group of volunteers to reconstruct this palisade using similar materials and techniques. The palisade fence was installed for three months in the original location (now a public park alongside the roadway). It was then dismantled into sections that are now being used by communities for events throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

The documentary programme made about the Palisade project for Television New Zealand's New Artland series can be viewed in the reading area or online at <http://tvnzondemand.co.nz>

Louise Menzies

Offering a free, impartial and confidential service of information, assistance and referral to people in our communities, the New Zealand Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (C.A.B.) is an independent community organisation that was established in the 1970s and operates in over 90 locations around the country. The centres are run by volunteers and as John Barton described in 1976, 'Each C.A.B. can and should be different from others, according to local requirements. Time and groups and people may change, but the principle of community involvement means helping others and if our cities are to survive then this important principle should be a fact of life.'

Responding to the ideals of the C.A.B., Louise Menzies found connections between the organisation's values and her own interest in knowledge exchange, individual and collective agency. For *Self Defence Against Falls* (2008), a series of photographs based on collage works, Menzies juxtaposes C.A.B. print material and her own images and text with news media sources. The inflammatory headlines used during the recent financial crisis reflect a culture of fear and anxiety, and contrast starkly with the C.A.B. philosophy to provide solutions and support for local communities in whatever problems may arise. Superimposed and compared, Menzies questions how we reconcile these different registers aesthetically and politically, documenting the shifts in ethos for our contemporary lives.

Kate Newby

Built of materials that are almost consistent with their environments, the two parts of Kate Newby's sculpture *Don't act all scared like before* (2008) rest ambiguously, deflecting attention to their surroundings. Nudging into the footpath, a new structure shadows the low wooden fence that demarcates the public and private areas across the road from the gallery. Occupying a sliver of the pedestrian zone, one feels aware of the passing foot traffic that must traverse around this fixture. Contrarily, Newby's postcard image circulates through social networks, a memento that will eventually reside in personal effects. *Don't act all scared like before* confidently asserts its place in our daily relationships and routines, but the title is a warning that past falls and failures remain close to mind.

Louise Menzies and Kate Newby

Located on King Street and within close proximity of the gallery, the facing windows of Expressions, an IDEA services daybase, are usually decorated with art, crafts and the central values of the organisation: empowerment, inclusion, responsiveness and support. For *Thinking/willing* (2008) Louise Menzies and Kate Newby have exchanged the gallery's front window space with Expressions', opening a conversation around the physical, social and political relationships between the two buildings, their services and the people who visit them.

Kim Paton

As confrontational in scale as the issue at stake, Kim Paton's wall drawing *The Wal-Mart Effect* (2008) maps consumer culture and the corporate structures that control our liberalised global economy. Appropriating vinyl, a medium associated with advertising, its aesthetic is defiantly handmade. She presents a voice against our current production and consumption systems in favour of more equitable and localised trading schemes. Paton recently opened Independent Grocery stores in Raglan and Hamilton to provide an alternative to our supermarket duopoly and a similar trust in the possibilities of individual and community action underpins this work. Applied directly to the gallery walls, *The Wal-Mart Effect* embodies both the activist tone of graffiti and the format of an educational or business planning whiteboard, emphasising the architectural and social frameworks it is presented within. Sustainability may be the buzzword of the day, but as the recent international financial meltdown reveals, our economic structures are ripe for reform.

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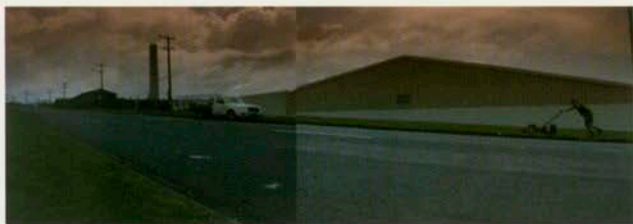
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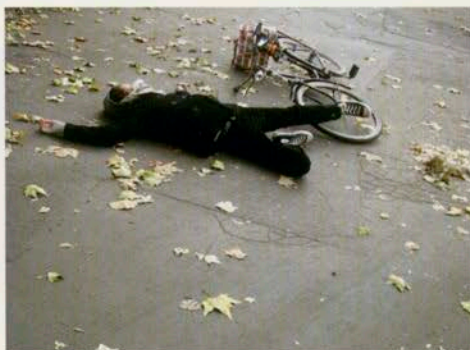
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A dense grid of rectangular boxes, each containing a street address and its corresponding zip code. The addresses are organized in a regular, repeating pattern across the entire page, representing a comprehensive list of residential or commercial locations. The text is small and tightly packed, typical of a directory or map index.