



**NEW
NATURE**

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It strikes me that our concepts of nature often don't match what we actually see...
The words 'nature', 'natural' and 'wilderness' end up misleading rather than informing us about the natural world. We shouldn't presume that nature, merely by definition, wants to be natural.

NEW NATURE

Rhana Devenport

How natural is nature? How wild is wilderness? Seeded by the ideas of Australian biologist Tim Low, the exhibition *New Nature* explores the cultural, geo-political and environmental conditions that shape our relationship with 'the nature' of nature.

As Low reminds us, nature is opportunistic, resourceful and constantly in flux. In recent years, robins have begun singing at night to be heard above the metropolitan din in Sheffield, while in Australia lyrebirds mimic mobile phone ring tones and embed them in their elaborate song recitals. As Low writes:

Nature is sold to us as something separate that lives far away from us in wild places, when really it's all around us, engaging with us more than we guess. The wilderness begins right here where we live. The 'new nature' is really the story of animals and plants responding to the latest environmental challenge - us.¹

So when rainbow lorikeets choose to roost in scraggy trees in the main streets of Queensland country towns, when swallows nest in New Zealand catamarans while colonies of bats sleep not in the leafy outskirts but in noisy parks in city centres, assumptions about the 'natural' come into question.

In modern western times, assumptions include the view of nature as something to be 'framed'. The term 'picturesque', meaning literally 'in the manner of a picture', was introduced as an aesthetic ideal to describe the leisurely English experience of 'viewing' savage landscapes.² Enthusiastic 'picturesque-hunting' became a popular pastime within the Romantic sensibility of the late eighteenth century. Nature here is seen as something to be visually tamed and interpreted; as something infused with

metaphoric meaning imposed by an observing and manipulative human other.

Val Plumwood, the late eminent Australian environmental philosopher proposed a radical critique of this anthropocentric notion. She argued that nature itself had moral standing, she refuted the idea that conservation was for the benefit of humanity rather than nature itself. Plumwood and others proposed a new environmental ethic that shifted the balance; 'an ethic of nature'.³

Extending their practice to Antarctica, the Arctic, Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, Brazil, China, Japan, Malaysia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, and Swaziland; the thirteen artists/collectives in this exhibition redress this imbalance between humanity and its perception of nature. These artists question our understanding of nature, its symbolic potency and its generative place in our imagination.

6 Nature as imaginative otherworldly terrain appears in Tang Maohong's eroticised animations, while Yeondoo Jung's elaborate photographic reconstructions of personal dream-states suggest the schism between artifice and experience. Lin Tianmiao's timeless vision of life's continuum and the seasonal cycles it inhabits questions nature, myth and metaphor, as do I-Lann Yee's photographs that conjure fantastic, pseudo-historical realms in Sulu – a watery zone of habitation and commerce between Malaysia and the Philippines. For Kuribayashi Takashi, gardens accrete in the hidden inner crevices within urban architecture, his secret gardens act as metaphors to the facility of nature to adapt to new and often hostile environments. This ready adaption being an insistent source of both hope and alarm.

In Caroline Rothwell's silhouettes, cipher-like fragments hint to larger and darker narratives around nature/culture interplays. These (almost) stories sit alongside revisions of the landscape genre in the photographs of Rosemary Laing, here lie devastating parables about ecological neglect. Michael Zavros, meanwhile, is

interested in nature not as the object of neglect, but as the object of obsession through manipulative breeding, a result of the human desire to create a hyper-refined state of natural beauty. Hybrid growth forms and processes take a step towards artificial life in Jon McCormack's digital animations while Cicada creates a double-take on synthetic white noise (both visual and aural) using stop-framed fields of natural organisms. Joe Sheehan also creates a disturbance in assumptions about synthetic and natural materials through an investigation of the cultural and symbolic place of pounamu (greenstone) carving.

I-TASC (Interpolar Transnational Art Science Constellation) enters into contested ideas around territory and non-territorial spaces, particularly the claims upon the Arctic and Antarctica, and the place these spaces occupy in communal and political imaginations. On New Plymouth's foreshore for the duration of the exhibition, I-TASC's sound-emitting replica of its information-gathering module in Antarctica, *GROUNDHOG3*, became an informal gathering space, a fissure in the landscape in which a transient new community found temporary root.

7 As I-TASC demonstrated, outside the Gallery slippages between 'natural' and 'constructed' worlds can become fertile, if aberrant sites for new conversations. These ideas are considered by Fiona Hall as she addresses environmental collateral damage and the significance of camouflage in war zones both far afield in the marshlands of Iraq, and close to home in Aotearoa. Hall's spiral garden of indigenous flaxes and grasses, *Mown*, the most permanently located of all works in the exhibition, continues to grow in Pukaka/Marsland Hill Memorial Park, introducing a contemplative, perhaps healing layer to the site's complex and contentious historical strata.

Boundaries between human and natural worlds hold particular resonance here in Taranaki. Aotearoa New Zealand environmentalist Geoff Park has interrogated

the unique historical and environmental context of the contaminated edge between cultivation and wilderness that encircles, almost perfectly in a ten kilometer radius, Mount Taranaki. Mount Egmont Reserve was the second declared reserve on the planet, demarcated in 1868 just four years after Yosemite was declared.⁴ The formation of both reserves mirrored the settler ideals of the 'native pristine', of nature as something 'free of influence' and the notion of 'scenery preservation'.⁵ Taranaki is emblematic of the discord and disjuncture between the place of nature within human thought – how nature is 'preserved' or 'put to use' – and the fragile forces of nature that adapt, atrophy and reinvent themselves in relentless response to adversarial circumstances. The impossibility of this separation, the failure of this bipolar distinction between humanity and wilderness, creates a space for an altered conception, perhaps towards Plumwood's idea of a new and much needed 'ethic of nature'.

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1. Tim Low, *The New Nature*, Penguin Books, Camberwell, 2003, p.3.
2. William Gilpin's *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape: to which is Added a Poem, On Landscape Painting* was published in London, 1792.
3. <http://education.guardian.co.uk/obituary/story/0,,2268027,00.html> Plumwood's books include *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1992) and *The Fight for the Forests* (1973) with Richard Routley.
4. Subsequently, this reserve was re-named Mount Egmont National Park in 1900, the second officially declared National Park in Aotearoa New Zealand after Tongariro National Park in 1887.
5. Geoff Park, *Wilderness in the New (Old) Nature*, Monica Brewster Lecture, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 31 July 2007.

Rhana Devenport, Director and exhibition curator

KAITIAKI/ECOLOGICAL GUARDIANSHIP

Huhana Smith

I begin this opening address with letting you all know where I am from. While born in rural Victoria, on the border between New South Wales in Australia, my mother is Ngāti Tūkorehe of the region of Kuku, Horowhenua. My grandmother Parewai had a sister who was a district nurse. She worked with Māori communities in the Opunake district not far from where we are now, Taranaki, and her name was Mirika Powhirihau Wehipeihana. I address you all with the nature of my ancestors, my many relations, my grandmother, my great aunt and my mother's relationships to home mountain ranges, lands, waterways and coastline, firmly in mind ...

Taku turanga ake ki runga ki ngā maunga titohea o te takiwā ra,
Ko Tararua, ko Ōtarere, ko Poroporo, ko Pukeātua,
Ki ngā wai ora, ki ngā wai puna, ki ngā wai tuku kiri o te iwi, ko Ōhau, ko Makorokio, ko
Te Waimarama, ko Awamate, ko Te Awa-a-Tamati, ko Waikokopu, ko Kuku, ko Tikorangi, ko
Mangananao,
Me ngā hapū o te whenua, ko Te Mateawa, ko Te Rangitāwhia, ko Ngāti Manu, ko Ngāti
Tūkorehe, ko Ngāti Kapumanawahiti ki Kuku o te rohe ki te iwi nei o Tūkorehe.

9

What I offered you just now is an indication of how people belong to regions, how they are physically and spiritually interrelated to different parts of Aotearoa. The area I recited tells of our hapū (sub-tribe) and iwi (tribe), who are linked to mountains, lakes, rivers, streams, and freshwater springs – between the mountains to the sea at Kuku, Horowhenua. These words also express cultural responsibilities to lands as members of the larger tribe, Tūkorehe.

In addressing you all at this opening of *New Nature*, I draw on the sensibilities of tohunga¹ Hohepa Kereopa, who in a recent publication articulated a cultural world-view for a contemporary Māori society. His words resonated by stating quite simply the necessity for human kind to relinquish control or 'being in charge' of the natural world. It is pressing to understand the importance of 'wairua and mana'² within everything, and to acknowledge the relationships that exist between humanity and the environment for health and wellbeing. He states:

... the job of the kaitiaki (ecological guardian), is to keep the things of Creation safe. The return from this is the relationship you get with the thing you are protecting and the knowledge and learning that comes from that. When the world was created, everything was given full wairua and mana, like the trees for example, so that everything is its own master. So if people want to exercise kaitiaki, they will first need to understand the value of all things, and the wairua of all things... they will know the effects and consequences of doing things to trees, or whatever. For us this does not mean being in charge... you don't go and tell the pipi (clam), how to live, you allow it to have the opportunity to live the way it knows best, and that is what kaitiaki is... it is about knowing the place of the things in this world, including your place in this world. When you get to that point, you realise that the thinking of all things is the same.³

This statement extends well to local kaitiaki or ecological guardians in tribal regions to know their locale, their place, their place within it and the unique environmental and spiritual values supporting it for future generations' physical, economic and cultural welfare.

The research work and active restoration projects that the local environmental team from Tukorehe have been involved in since 2000, have investigated relationships between iwi, hapū and whānau (families) and their natural world. The research findings

directly contribute to ecosystem restoration in cultural landscapes, transformed by agricultural and historical water engineering works. Much of the work draws heavily on Māori concepts, experiences and aspirations for environmental rehabilitation in tribal regions. Our environmental team at home are actively restoring dune wetlands and the lower reaches of river systems to sea, within a southwest coastal plain, known as Kuku in the coastal Horowhenua region.

The research has explored the movement towards environmental sustainability by surveying a valued, ancestral or cultural landscape that was once abundant forest, a series of lakes, lagoons and wetlands adjacent to dunes systems to sea. While the cultural landscape we experience today has been created by human actions, impacts and influences over time, the coastal area remains well regarded as land, sea and water based taonga - an encompassing term that denotes both value and relationships. A 'taonga' is valued because of the associations it accumulates.

Any ecosystem with particular species that were significant for food or other purposes, and which was known to have qualities considered to be vital to those species' life-sustaining processes, was likely to have had taonga status in the customary Māori landscape. A swamp or coastal foreshore ecosystem that possessed such qualities, or a river ecosystem, or a forest, could be considered, with the people it sustained, to be a living being and be termed a taonga.⁴

When I mentioned the different lands forms in my pēheha or explanation of ancestral connections, I ran you through the most significant cultural markers in our landscape, a form of taunahanahatanga or the naming and bespeaking of lands from mountain ranges to rivers, streams and fresh water springs that interlink hapū and iwi of Tukorehe to a sense of knowing their place, and how as kaitiaki (active guardians), we know our place within it.

My partner Richard and I live amongst my Māori relations on ancestral land, in a predominantly rural community, between the Taranaki ranges to the sea, between the Ōhau and Waikawa Rivers. While I may work at Te Papa as Senior Curator Māori dealing with both customary and contemporary visual culture and particularly intricate research around taonga Māori with other iwi and hapū participants, I come home to action research strategies underway for the restoration of Te Hākari dune wetland and lower reaches of the Ōhau River, re-edifying relationships and tribal responsibilities to land and waterways, and developing mapping strategies to protect cultural significance in lands.

12 We are transforming a former cow-pugged and drained wetland of national significance within a tribal dairy farming enterprise. With this hands-on transformative work comes the notion of fluid thinking, a way of knowledge that revolves around waterways coiling towards the ocean. We understand that subsurface waterways and lakes connect diverted river systems, cut off from natural flows for flood protection on the surface. The potential of fluid thinking re-imagines peoples' belonging to place and reinstates their responsibilities to land, waterways or wetlands for ecosystems both above and below the surface.

There is so much I could tell you, with before and after photographs to support how water transforms. What I get most excited about when raising water levels in wetlands again, is that associated wetland streams (that only recently flowed through heavily grazed paddocks as nitrified or polluted waters) are becoming ecologically productive again as vital systems for biodiversity. Wiwi or native riparian rushes and reeds produce large quantities of microscopic seed that remain in the riparian soil, for years. When water is restored to contour, the wet delta at Te Hākari dune wetland stream has literally recovered its memory of how to be a reed-rich riparian

area once more, with profuse rushes and reed growth that are buffeted and shaped by north westerly winds.

In raising water levels for the wetland and delta region this phase of activity supported hydrology research that came within the government's overarching biodiversity protection strategy. The strategy increases the management of indigenous biodiversity outside public conservation lands, especially those on private and Māori land that are under legal protection. In reinstating water to contour for the dune wetland within a covenant, this activated diverse native reed and grass revegetation and has enlivened the habitats of native fish, frogs, wading birds and other endangered species.⁵

The rest of our labours are about intensive re-habilitation and playing with the potential and creativity of natural but modified systems, so as to reconnect peoples' local relationships with former abundant resources, their fish, plants, birds and animals that inhabit and feed at the rich Te Hākari wetland. The wetland's name is testament to a feast, a place of harvest, which acknowledges the relationships that exist between humanity and the environment for health and wellbeing. Over the last decade, kaitiaki or ecological guardians in our tribal region have been revitalising knowledge of their locale, their place, their place and roles within it and the unique environmental and spiritual values that support it for future generations' physical, economic and cultural welfare.

I am impressed and moved by the artists' work in this exhibition, with Fiona Hall's very relevant Marsh Arab carpet on the floor before me. It is an honour to be in the presence of Taranaki maunga, to be introduced by such an esteemed kaumatua of Kahui Maunga, Lindsay Macleod, and for the opportunity to be here with particular thanks to the Director and the staff of the Govett-Brewster.

Finally to the artists, who make *New Nature* such vital viewing... He mahana tōku mihi atu ki a koutou katoa.

– Adapted from opening address, *New Nature*, May 2007

- 1 A tohunga is an esoteric knowledge person, trained in the philosophical teachings of the traditional whare wananga.
- 2 In this context, wairua and mana may refer to the essential essence or spirit and integrity.
- 3 Paul Moon, *Tohunga Hohepa Kereopa*, David Ling Publishing Ltd: Auckland, 2003, p.131
- 4 Geoff Park, 'Effective Exclusion? An exploratory overview of Crown actions and Māori responses concerning the indigenous flora and fauna, 1912–1983'. Waitangi Tribunal Report: Wellington, 2002, p.181.
- 5 The Biodiversity Condition fund through the Ministry for the Environment invites applications twice a year from private landowners and community groups for projects aimed at improving or maintaining the condition of indigenous vegetation, species and habitats.

Dr Huhana Smith is Senior Curator Māori at the Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa. Her recently completed Doctorate addresses iwi and hapū approaches to revitalising ecosystems within cultural landscape and the complexity kaitiaki face with fragmented natural environments in tribal regions. She is a member of Te Iwi o Ngāti Tukorehe Trust's Environmental sub-committee and currently runs monthly environmental courses on weekends. Dr Smith is also Chairperson of Te Runanga o Raukawa and the Taiao Raukawa Environmental Research Centre, based in Otaki, working closely with key participants, researchers and kaitiaki from the wider Raukawa tribal region. She is a practising artist/painter basing much of her recent works on hydrological research conducted around the nitrification of surface and subsurface waterways and the lack of real protection mechanisms for Māori physical and cultural significance within landscape.

ARTISTS

Rhana Devenport

Melanie Oliver

CICADA

FIONA HALL

I-TASC

KURIBAYASHI TAKASHI

ROSEMARY LAING

LIN TIANMIAO

JON McCORMACK

CAROLINE ROTHWELL

JOE SHEEHAN

TANG MAOHONG

YEE I-LANN

YEONDOO JUNG

MICHAEL ZAVROS

CICADA

KIRSTEN BRADLEY, NICK RITAR AND BEN FROST. FORMED 2002

Litter (2007) is a study in perception; an aural and visual investigation into the possibilities of simulating the unnatural by use of the organic. This moving image work echoes television static through the treatment of stop-frame animation of flora. What we perceive as natural is in a constant state of change.

Nature has long been manipulated by cultural actions. The rampant simulation of natural environments for varied purposes within science, advertising, filmmaking and art realms could be seen as further manipulations of nature. Perhaps it is only through attempts to simulate natural environments that their inherent complexity is fully realised, albeit seldom fully understood. In a world out of balance, it is perhaps at the boundaries between what is perceived as organic, and what is perceived as simulated, where the most interesting questions about our natural and constructed worlds lie.

Cicada is a collaboration between Australian artists Kirsten Bradley, born in 1977, Nick Ritar born in 1973 and Ben Frost, born in 1980, working out of Australia and Iceland. Since forming in 2002, they have primarily worked together exploring landscapes – urban, natural, sonic, constructed and imagined. Projects have included *Re_Squared for Primavera*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2003; an organic interactive public installation for the City of Adelaide entitled *Amensal* in 2005; and *MOB*, an audiovisual study of the crowd as a discrete organism, for *Meat Market*, Melbourne, 2006; in 2007 Kirsten Bradley was Artist in Residence, Banff Centre for the Arts, Alberta, Canada.

FIONA HALL

b. 1953, lives and works in Adelaide, Australia

Located at Pukaka (Marsland Hill), *Mown* (2007) is a garden installation by Fiona Hall that acknowledges and commemorates this potent yet somewhat neglected local site. On this hill, just a short walk from the Gallery, approximately 2,500 New Zealand indigenous flaxes and grasses have been installed in an area of 190 square metres to follow the camouflage formation specific to New Zealand defence forces. The grasses and flax surround and embellish the memorial that was erected in 1909 to honour those who died in the Taranaki Wars of the mid-nineteenth century (1845–47 and 1860–70). In this way, *Mown* invites discussion on the destruction and futility of war, while raising awareness of the complex and fraught cultural and colonial history specific to the Taranaki region.

Pukaka was originally a pā site for Te Atiawa and Nga Potiki Taua that was abandoned by the time European settlers arrived. In the early 1850s, the top of the hill was cut away and the site utilised for British military barracks, a defence signalling system and as a place of refuge for New Plymouth settlers nervous of attack from Māori. After the imperial troops left in 1870, the barracks were used as temporary accommodation for immigrants until the buildings became untenable and were removed, Pukaka was then designated as a town reserve. The marble soldier that originally featured atop the memorial, carved in Italy and mistakenly clasping a hand over the muzzle of his firearm, was frequently vandalised and destroyed in 1992 leaving the plinth empty, as it is today. Plants possess the ability to convey local knowledge and are significant as symbols of place and memory. The rejuvenation of the memorial with indigenous plants acts as a tribute to all those connected with

this site through its history. A spiral grassy path to the memorial is like the unfurling frond of the kaponga (tree fern), a symbol of rebirth.

The second work by Fiona Hall is *Mire* (2005). The 'Marsh Arabs' inhabited a fertile wetland ecosystem covering around 12,000 square miles in southern Iraq for approximately 5,000 years. After participating in rebellion against Saddam Hussein following the first Gulf War, their homeland was drained and dammed to the point that little remained of the previously flourishing wetlands populated by diverse aquatic life, buffalo and migratory birds. Commentators note that there was very little economic purpose to this action which was seen as a retaliatory gesture by the authorities. The original population of around 500,000 dwindled to a few thousand Marsh Arabs, the rest relocated to other parts of Iraq and to neighbouring countries. An estimated 50 per cent of the wetlands having now been rejuvenated, but it will take many years before this ecosystem resembles its previous state.

In *Mire* Hall has designed a domestic rug that juxtaposes fourteen wetland species that became threatened through this action – their names written in Iraqi and embroidered in Arabic – alongside a water snake (*natrix tessellata/dice snake*) and a frog, set against a field of camouflage. The camouflage used is that of the United States military in Iraq. Hall has long been interested in relationships across people, economies and plants and in *Mire* we see the natural world as the profound casualty of warfare.

Born in Sydney, Fiona Hall is a passionate observer of our natural and political worlds. Hall's career spans three decades of study and practice in the United Kingdom, United States, Sri Lanka and Australia. Her work combines skills of the handmade and research into socio-political, environmental and bio-diversity issues. Her solo survey *Fiona Hall: Force Field* will show at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Wellington City Gallery, Christchurch Art Gallery and Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in 2008/09.

I-TASC (INTERPOLAR TRANSNATIONAL ART SCIENCE CONSTELLATION)

**AMANDA RODRIGUES ALVES, ADAM HYDE, REBECCA MATTOS, THOMAS MULCAIRE,
NTSIKELELO NTSHINGILA AND SASO POGDORSEK, FORMED 2005**

Conceived by Thomas Mulcaire and Marko Peljhan, I-TASC is an expanding decentralised network of individuals and organisations working collaboratively in the fields of art, engineering and science on the interdisciplinary development and tactical deployment of renewable energy, waste recycling systems, sustainable architecture and open-format, open-source media.

I-TASC is a symbiotic structure sharing and integrating local knowledge, resources and skills across six continents in order to engage with the air, ocean, earth and space commons. Acknowledging that Antarctica and the Arctic are critical departure points in developing a complex understanding of common ground, I-TASC is establishing the framework conditions for collaborative projects between artists, scientists and engineers through the development of a solar and wind powered mobile research station in Antarctica and in the Arctic. The work on board both stations will focus on three global and interconnected systems: migration, weather and communications, as means to explore how our planet functions on natural, social and technological levels.

An official project of the current International Polar Year, 2007/2008, I-TASC's activities in Antarctica are supported by the South African National Antarctic Program and is unfolding in three parts: a reconnaissance and communication expedition was conducted between December 2006 and February 2007, resulting in the deployment of the *GROUNDHOG* automatic weather station near the South African Antarctic base. The *GROUNDHOG* unit is gathering

environmental and meteorological data which will be used in the design of the mobile station; An environmental impact assessment, systems installation and materials testing expedition for the mobile station, codenamed LICHEN, will follow in 2007/2008; and finally I-TASC will install a renewable energy remote polar research base LADOMIR in the 2008/2009 Antarctic summer. – I-TASC

The first I-TASC expedition crew to Antarctica consisted of Amanda Rodrigues Alves (Brazil), Adam Hyde (Aotearoa New Zealand), Ntsikelelo Ntshingila (South Africa/Swaziland) and Thomas Mulcaire (South Africa).

The contribution of I-TASC within *New Nature* was multiple. The wind-powered *GROUNDHOG 3* (2007) unit was installed on the New Plymouth foreshore. This structure being located 7,721 kilometres from the original site, and emitted data automatically sent by the weather station in Antarctica with music produced from sound recordings made by the I-TASC crew during their time in Antarctica. Additionally, two video works associated with the project, one shot in Antarctica and another in the Arctic, were screened on monitors in the Gallery.

In addition to the presence of I-TASC, Thomas Mulcaire and Amanda Rodrigues Alves presented *National Park* (2004-) within the Gallery. This video was filmed in the Kruger National Park in South Africa. The park is roughly the same size as Israel and is situated in the north-east corner of South Africa, bordering on Mozambique to the east, Zimbabwe to the north and Swaziland a bit further to the south. Despite its image as a pristine wilderness, the establishment and consolidation of the Kruger National Park between 1898 and 1969 followed the same history of forced removals and exclusion that took place in the rest of South Africa during British colonial rule and apartheid. People who previously had subsisted and traded in the area for many centuries were banned from hunting or farming on the land and were

forcibly relocated to farms and towns on the border of the park. People from these communities were at the same time recruited or coerced into the migrant labour system which supplied the demand for workers in industrialised urban centres like Johannesburg and Kimberly, which grew rapidly after the discovery of gold and diamonds in the interior of South Africa in the late nineteenth century. Today the park is the cornerstone of South Africa's tourism industry, attracting over a million international and local visitors per year, who drive around the park in their own vehicles following old trade routes and newly built roads. *National Park* is a chronological arrangement of chance encounters between animals and FM radio stations along these tourist routes in the park.

Amanda Rodrigues Alves, born in 1976 in São Paulo, Brazil, lives and works in São Paulo. She studied History at the University of São Paulo and completed a Bachelor of Arts degree at Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado (FAAP) and a Diploma in Art Education at the Centro Universitário de Belas Artes, both in São Paulo. She was a founding member of the collaborative group MICO; a collective of artists, architects, geographers and political scientists responsible for a series of critical interventions in the São Paulo urban landscape between 2000 and 2003. *National Park* was first exhibited at Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart, where Amanda Rodrigues Alves was resident fellow in 2006.

Thomas Mulcaire, born 1971 in Johannesburg, South Africa, lives and works in São Paulo, Brazil. He graduated from the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg with a degree in History of Art and Literature. Mulcaire coordinated the exhibition components of the inaugural Johannesburg Biennale in 1995 and was a member of the artistic direction of *documenta X* in Kassel in 1997. In 1999 he founded the Institute for Contemporary Art in Cape Town. His work has been exhibited in the 1998 São Paulo Bienal, Ars Electronica in Linz in 2002, at the South African National Gallery in 2003, and the Biennale of Sydney 2004.

KURIBAYASHI TAKASHI

b. 1968, lives and works in Zushi, Japan

While the vastness of the ocean never reminds me of water dripping from the tap, running water out of the tap makes me take notice of the existence of the ocean. Wonder why?

We all connect with nature. – Kuribayashi Takashi

22 For Kuribayashi Takashi wild imaginings proliferate beneath and between unassuming architectural surfaces. Taking the urban gallery space as a departure point, Kuribayashi transgresses spatial limits, merging incongruous worlds and overturning reality to create a new natural environment that depends on the elements of surprise, belief and wonder. Peering through the looking glass, our modes of viewing are unhinged as the artist offers us another world, another space, another view that inhabits the crevices of urban buildings. The artist conjures an allegory for the poetic coalescence of nature and culture and creates a temporality for the imagination to wander.

Born in Nagasaki, Japan, Kuribayashi Takashi graduated from the Musashino Art University, Tokyo, the University of Kassel, Germany and the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Germany. Kuribayashi has presented solo exhibitions in Düsseldorf, Cologne, the Netherlands and Tokyo. Recent group exhibitions include *Out of the Blue*, Tokyo Wonder Site, Japan, 2003; *Continental Borderland*, Royal Chitwan National Park, Nepal, 1995; *New York Independent Art Fair*, US, 2000; *Adventure at/of the Museum*, Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Japan, 2004/2005; *belief: Singapore Biennale 2006* and *Thermocline of Art: New Asian Waves*; ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany 2007.

ROSEMARY LAING

b. 1959, lives and works in Sydney, Australia

Rosemary Laing's photographic images evoke complex histories of the land and habitation, creating poetic relationships amongst landscape, culture and notions of place. With *swanfires* (2004) Laing draws attention to the ecological imbalance that results from recent attempts to control the environment. In Australia, the delaying of natural burn offs and the prevention of systematic burnings for hunting and land control purposes by Indigenous peoples has today created extreme bush fire conditions. Here, two buildings lie devastated in the aftermath of the destructive 2002 bush fires in New South Wales.

The series *one dozen unnatural disasters in the Australian landscape* (2003) can be seen as part of and distinct from the tradition of landscape depiction in art. Laing uses the visual cliché of nature as sublime, yet undermines this by including the detritus of modern culture. Here the central image of Uluru (Ayers Rock) – itself a powerful symbol shared by Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians – is juxtaposed with twentieth century furniture design icons; heightened in red ochre and forming an uneasy relationship with the vast and spectacular natural environment.

Born in Brisbane, Rosemary Laing has exhibited widely both within Australia and internationally. Solo exhibitions have been presented at Galerie Conrads, Dusseldorf, Germany; Kunsthallen Brandst, Odense, Denmark; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2005 and Dormus Artium 2002, Salamanca, Spain, 2004. Group exhibitions include *Chasm: Busan Biennale*, Korea (2004); *Landscape and memory*, La Casa Encendida, Madrid, Spain; *Face-up: Contemporary Art from Australia* at the Nationalgalerie, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, 2003; *Think with the Senses – Feel with the Mind. Art in the Present Tense*; 52nd la Biennale di Venezia 2007; and Biennale of Sydney 2008

LIN TIANMIAO

b. 1961, lives and works in Beijing, China

24 Lin Tianmiao is acclaimed internationally for her conceptual practices using powerful images and incorporating sculptural, photographic and video forms. Lin has constructed extraordinary works through the weaving or binding of white cotton thread around objects and through photographs, thus politicising symbols, language, materials and forms in subtle ways. In *Growing* (2003), white cotton thread weaves through the landscape, forming and layering an expanding ball that rolls through fictitious environments. Time, narratives and histories evolve in fairytale episodes not unlike the compositions within traditional Chinese ink scroll painting. Incorporating only the female body within the land, Lin suggests an intimacy that links culture and fecundity. Reading the photograph from a Eurocentric system of left to right, meaning is unfurled rather than built. Reading the work from the Chinese perspective of right to left, the thread builds on itself. The complexity is heightened as the photograph begins where it ends in the landscape, thus alluding to the cyclic dimension of time, the seasons and life-cycles.

Born in Shanxi Province, China, Lin Tianmiao graduated from Capital Normal University, Beijing and New York's Art Student League. She practiced commercial textile design in New York and Beijing for a decade before embarking on her art practice in the 1990s. Lin currently lives and works out of Beijing creating predominantly installation pieces that touch upon issues of domestic labour, modernisation, gender and technology within China. Involved in organising 'Apartment Art' exhibitions with her artist husband, Wang Gongxin, Lin has exhibited extensively in China and internationally. She was included in the American touring exhibition *Inside/Out: New Chinese Art, 1998-2000*, as well as numerous group exhibitions, biennales and triennales, most recently *Global Feminisms* at Brooklyn Museum, 2007.

JON McCORMACK

b. 1964, lives and works in Melbourne, Australia

My artwork and writing is concerned with evolution, as a process, a metaphor and a philosophical foundation. I am interested with the way we relate and view nature and artifice, design and synthesis, creation and evolution. – Jon McCormack, *Impossible Nature: the Art of Jon McCormack*, Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne, 2004, p. 3.

25 *Universal Zoologies* (1999) is an interconnected series of autonomous, self-generating, poetic spaces inspired by diorama in natural history museums. The project aims to represent emotive, abstract, artificial life digi-scapes, each based around a thematic metaphor evoking qualities of the natural world. The work creates a rich and elaborate visual space – a dream of strange and numinous creatures that have evolved through a complex process of rule-based selection. These spaces are generated by complex software developed by the artist as part of the production process. The power of the work is in its blurring of the boundaries of space, time, place and process while offering a poetic re-interpretation of the natural.

Born in Melbourne, Jon McCormack is an acclaimed electronic media artist interested in artificial life and evolutionary music and art. McCormack holds an Honours degree in Applied Mathematics and Computer Science from Monash University, a Graduate Diploma of Art from Swinburne University and a PhD in Computer Science from Monash University. He is currently Senior Lecturer in Computer Science and co-director of the Centre for Electronic Media Art (CEMA) at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. He has exhibited widely in international circles including Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, France, the United Kingdom, China, Japan and the United States.

CAROLINE ROTHWELL

b. 1967, lives and works in Sydney, Australia

26 Caroline Rothwell transforms the familiar and ordinary into the strange and uncanny. Her work *Lexicon* (2007) comprises huge silhouettes based on ordinary plants and creatures that creep across gallery walls, spill onto floors and float on surfaces above. The disparate elements are fictional hybrids adapted from existing interpretations of nature. Drawings from botanical books, objects in natural history museums and diagrams made by botanists on first contact with new lands; these images are used as sources for plunder, alteration and re-assembly. Plants, people, mammals, birds and watery creatures are made strange by their new scale and context. The works are cut by hand from black PVC, a method that combines the perfection of the industrial with the steady presence of the artist's hand. The treatment of the 'natural' in Rothwell's work is emblematic of the desire by humans to document, classify and control, it raises questions about genetic engineering, of preconceptions of the natural world, and the attribution of meaning to images through a sculptural and drawing practice that spans materials from lead to inflatables.

Born in the United Kingdom, a New Zealand resident and now based in Sydney, Caroline Rothwell has presented solo shows throughout Australasia and internationally, and participated in numerous group exhibitions. A significant facet of her practice to date has been the execution of major public and corporate commissions including a large-scale work for Goodwood Sculpture Park in England; in an outdoor sculptural installation for the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington; and an inflatable monument Hybrid for *Terminus* 2006 in Sydney.

JOE SHEEHAN

b. 1976, lives and works in Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand

Joe Sheehan asserts diverse social and cultural contexts for pounamu (greenstone). He addresses the marketing of jade's cultural associations while examining the relevance and position of pounamu carving in today's world. Sheehan creates exquisitely carved and carefully considered replicas of objects from everyday life and presents them in a manner that mimics the presentation of artefacts and specimens in museum cabinets.

Traversing across cultures, local and international, historical and present, he seeks out commonality, whilst maintaining respect for both customary and contemporary pounamu workers. In so doing, Sheehan's work also serves as a critique of the tourist market, identifying the production methods as being removed from either traditional or fresh conceptual underpinnings. Sheehan questions the idea of authenticity, as well as the quality, value and symbolic role of souvenir trinkets. He suggests ubiquitous and mass-produced pieces made for tourist retail venues are perhaps as authentic as other elements of Aotearoa New Zealand's 'clean, green and beautiful' tourism image.

Born in Aotearoa New Zealand, Joe Sheehan graduated from Unitec, Auckland in 1996. Recent solo shows include Objectspace, Auckland, 2005; FhE G2 Galleries, Auckland, 2006; and Avid Gallery, Wellington, 2004. In 2006 Sheehan was awarded an Inaugural 'New Generation' Artist Award from the Arts Foundation of New Zealand and will be included in the Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil, 2008.

TANG MAOHONG

b. 1975, lives and works in Shanghai, China

28 Tang Maohong's hand-drawn animation *Sunday* (2006) enters the absurd, witty, seductive and grotesque elements of our conscious and subconscious lives. The Chinese title refers to an imagined garden, and in this surreal landscape unlikely juxtapositions of challenging and innocent content contribute to the disturbing humour and poignancy of Tang's artificial world. Featuring erotic body parts, strange micro-organisms, snails, slugs and decapitated angels, *Sunday* both references and undermines art histories and popular culture. Composed within five circular frames, Tang evokes Chinese bird and flower paintings but is remarkably less formal in his representations of nature. Tang collects media images daily and through reworking and manipulating these visual archives he reassembles a perverse rendering to create a fanciful two-dimensional other worldly adventure accompanied by an insistent and giddy pop soundscape.

Born in Guilin, China, Tang Maohong graduated from the Shanghai School of Art and Crafts and the China National Academy of Fine Arts. Currently based in Shanghai, his recent exhibitions include *Shanghai Surprise*, Lothringer 13, Art Center, Munich, 2004; *Is it Art? – White Show*, Shanxi Provincial Art Museum, Xian, China, 2004; *A lot of dust – a lot of ash*, Bizart, Shanghai, 2005; *Asian Traffic*, Zenda! MoMA, Shanghai, 2005; *Bit Map – International Digital Photo Project*, Loop, Seoul, 2006; and *belief: Singapore Biennale*, 2006.

YEE I-LANN

b. 1971, lives and works in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

I stand on the Malaysian Pulau Selingan off the coast of Sandakan in Sabah. I see two islands in front of me. On the left is Pulau Bakungan, Philippines, on my right Pulau Bakkungan Kecil, Malaysia. The two islands and myself form a triangle; I am told we are all about four kilometres apart. Somewhere between us is a watery formless border but I neither see it or sense it. We are in a zone not quite Filipino, not quite Malaysian, but very aware of being Sulu. – Yee I-Lann

The seascape of Sulu spans from the Sabah district of Malaysia, to the southwest of the Philippines. It is a region with a rich cultural history but also one of political turbulence. In the *Sulu Stories* (2005) series, Yee I-Lann explores the enchanting legends that flourish in Sulu, the communion of landscape and memory, and her Malaysian identity that floats somewhere amidst these dissolvable watery borders. Here, the situation of Sulu presents a metaphor to broader global issues, to fantastical historical realms, and to contemporary, post-national identity.

Born in Sabah, Malaysia, Yee I-Lann lives and works as an artist and set designer in Kuala Lumpur. She graduated in 1992 from the University of South Australia in Adelaide in Visual Arts and later studied painting at Central St. Martins School of Arts in London. Incorporating various media including photography, installation and video, her practice seeks connections between landscape, perception and cultural identity. Yee I-Lann has exhibited widely in Malaysia and internationally. In 1999, she participated in the *Third Asia-Pacific Triennial* at the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; in 2002 exhibited at *ARCO*, Madrid; and most recently in *belief: Singapore Biennale*, 2006.

YEONDOO JUNG

b. 1969, lives and works in Seoul, South Korea

30 First impressions can slide. In his *Location* (2006) series, Yeondoo Jung reframes nature as picturesque cliché. The resultant images are unsettling in their understated theatricality, it is difficult to discern whether the scenes are 'fake' or 'real'. The works are, however, analogue photographs of elaborate and cleverly constructed realities, assembled by the artist and making overt the simulated, while the real becomes so real that it appears somehow fake. Ordinary life is heightened and made more dream-like; as nature is infiltrated by and filtered through cultural frames and personal visions. The idea of articulating dreams into reality is a recurring theme in Jung's work. By staging nature as almost dream-state/almost hyperreality, Jung teases out ideas concerning human perception, illusion, truth and the natural world. In a previous project, *Bewitched* (2001), Jung photographed the dreams and fantasies of young adults, bringing their unbridled secrets into reality. In these pairings of photographs, a high school student becomes a polar explorer, while a petrol station employee is transformed into a triumphant racing car driver. As in *Location*, external and internal perceptions of reality appear simultaneously.

South Korean artist Yeondoo Jung graduated from Seoul National University in 1994 and earned a Masters of Fine Arts from Goldsmith College, London in 1997. He has undertaken numerous artist residencies and exhibited extensively in New York, Seoul and Europe. Jung was named 2007 Artist of the Year in South Korea and was honoured with a solo exhibition at the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul.

MICHAEL ZAVROS

b. 1974, lives and works in Brisbane, Australia

Michael Zavros is entranced by arcane and hyper-refined notions of beauty. The worlds of male fashion and equestrian are amalgamated, spawning a new breed of stylised centaur as seen in *Yves Saint Laurent Le Smoking/Bay* (2006). Seductive surfaces and a sophisticated veneer run rampant alongside these proud stallions of haute couture. Zavros has coupled these paintings, which dramatically range in scale, with *Black Ice* (2007), a delicate bronze trophy-like cast of a blindfolded horse, a tribute to innocence and disclosure. It is common practice to blindfold horses to quieten them in disruptive or 'unnatural' environments such as road travel; given this, the work remains as almost a devotional offering to quietude and virtue.

Furthering his investigation of the engineered manipulation of nature to meet the desire of cultural conceits is Zavros's painting, *White Onagadori* (2006). Onagadori are a breed of Japanese rooster that can be traced to the Edo Period (1600 to 1868), the name roughly translating as 'Honourable Fowl' and a phenomena of animal breeding. These practices of breeding for cultural purposes are startling examples of the human desire towards a beauty that forcibly overrides or improves upon the 'natural'. Zavros highlights the manipulation and interpretation of nature as it stretches to culturally-infected extremes.

Brisbane-born Michael Zavros graduated from the Queensland College of Art in 1996. He has participated in various group exhibitions including *Primavera*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2000; *Sebastian: Contemporary Realist Painting, Quiet Collision: Current Practice/Australian Style*, Associazione ViaFarini, Milan, Italy, 2003; and *Uncanny*, Artspace Auckland, New Zealand, 2005. In 2003/2004 Zavros presented a solo exhibition at the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane.





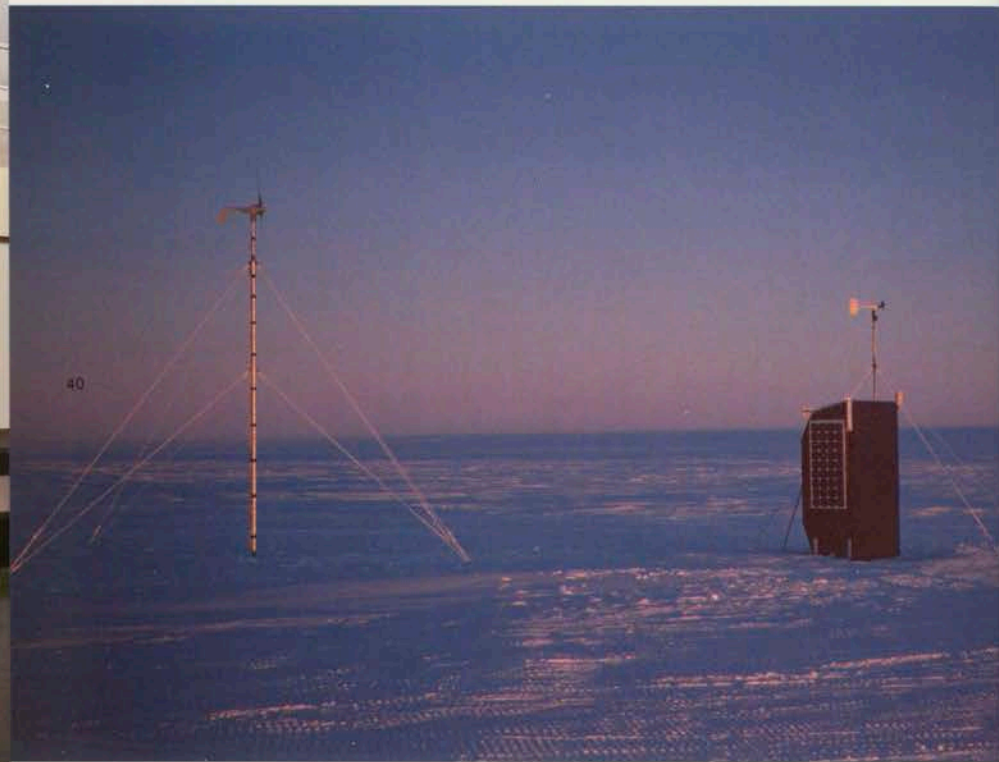


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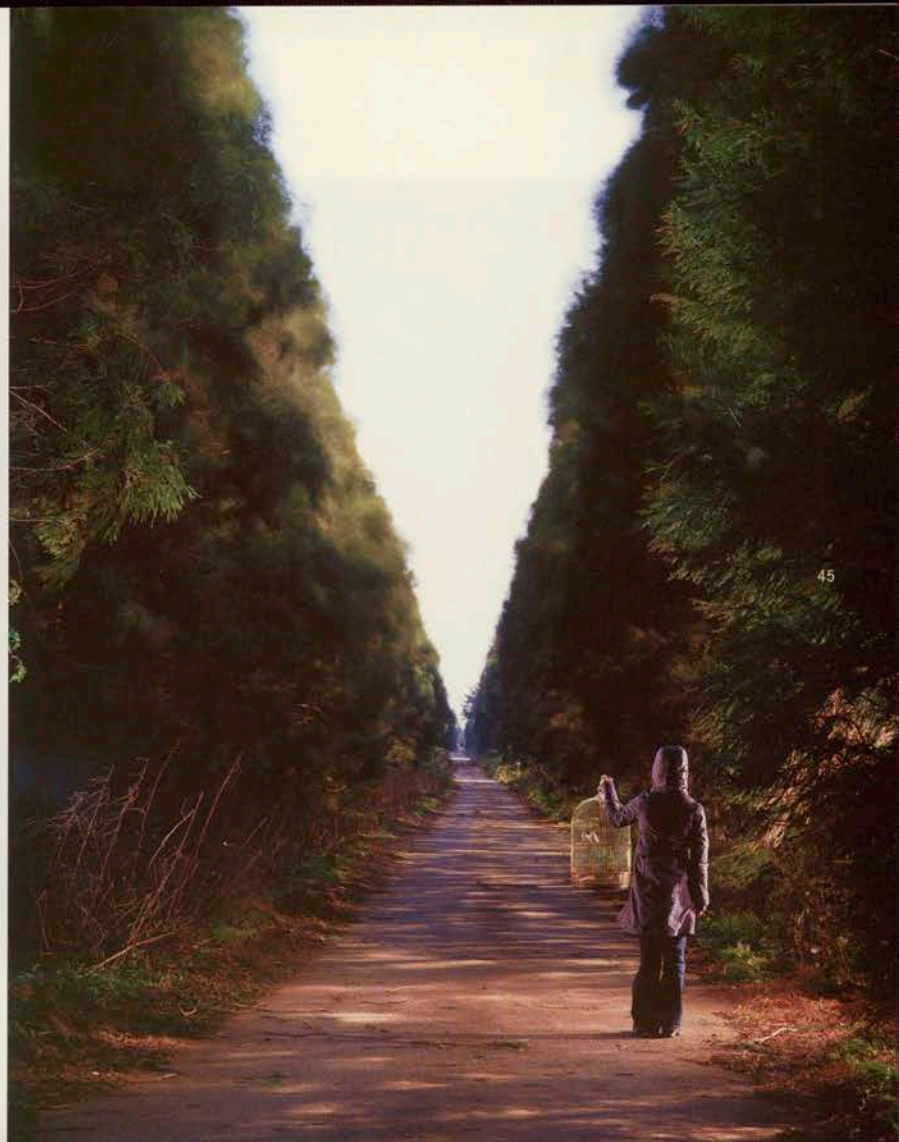


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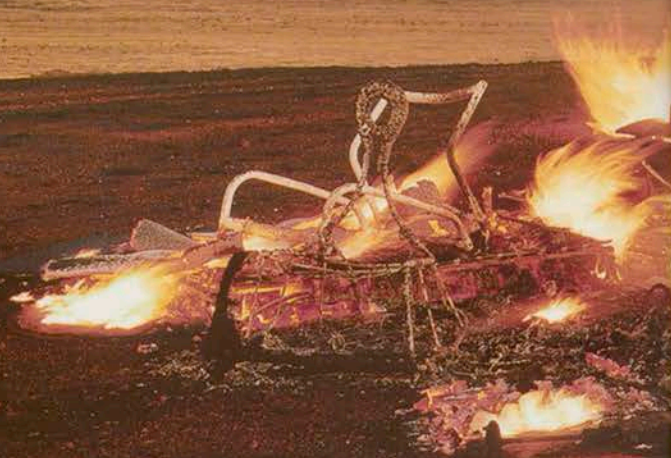




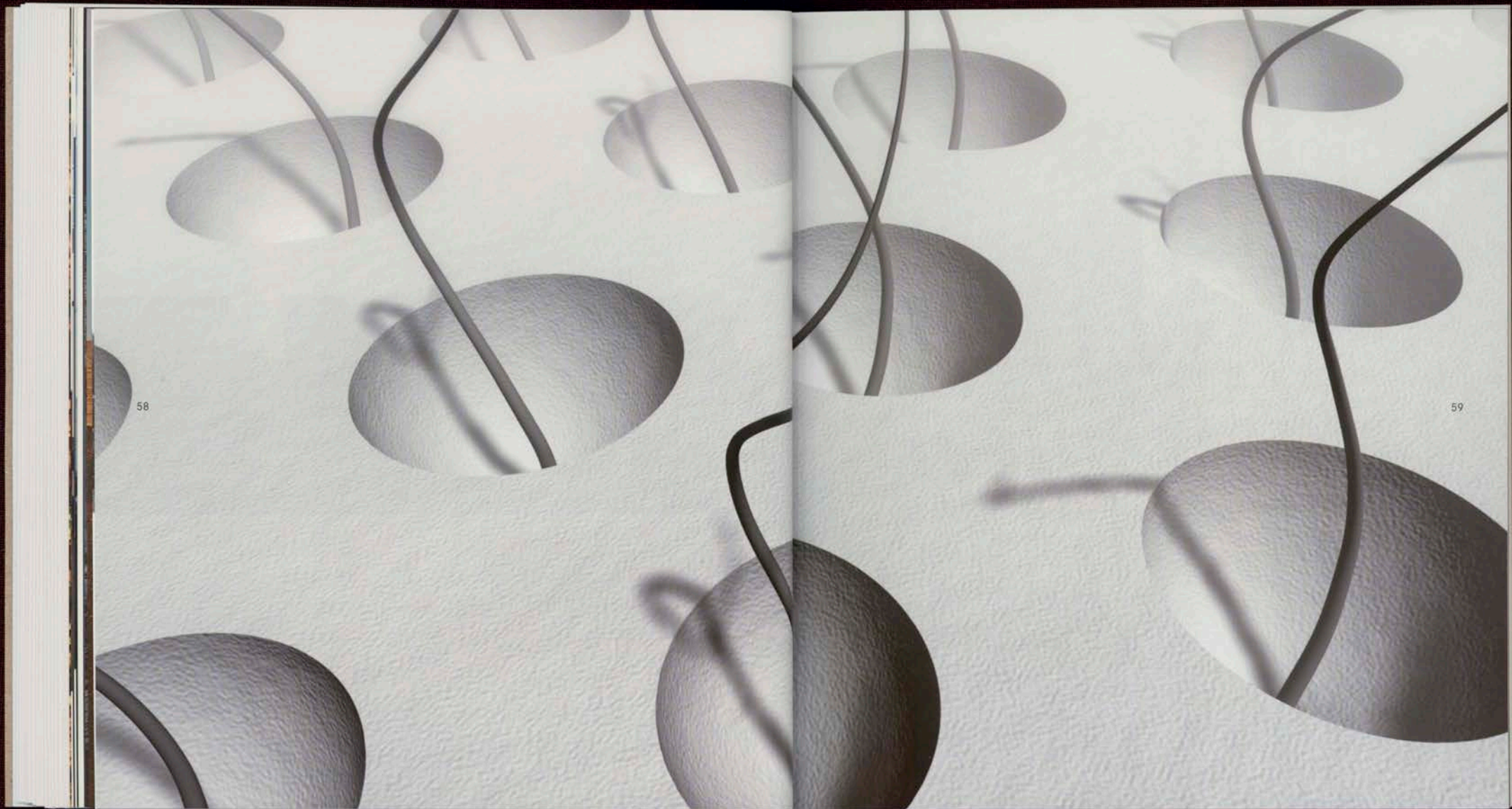
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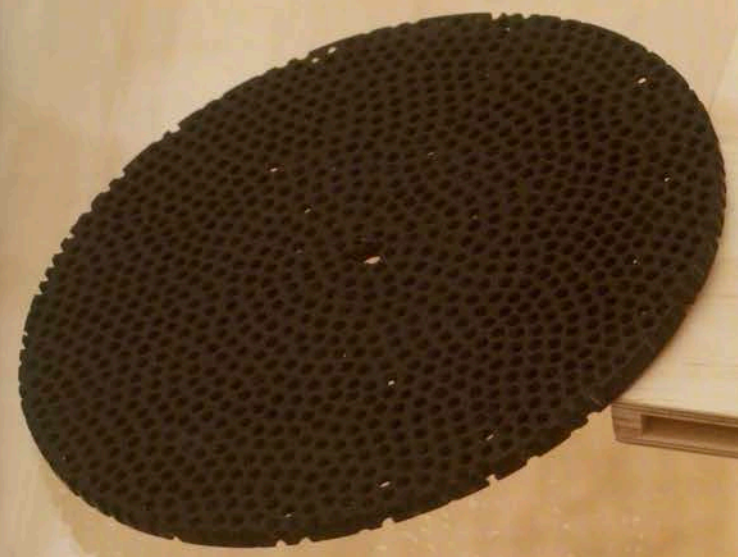
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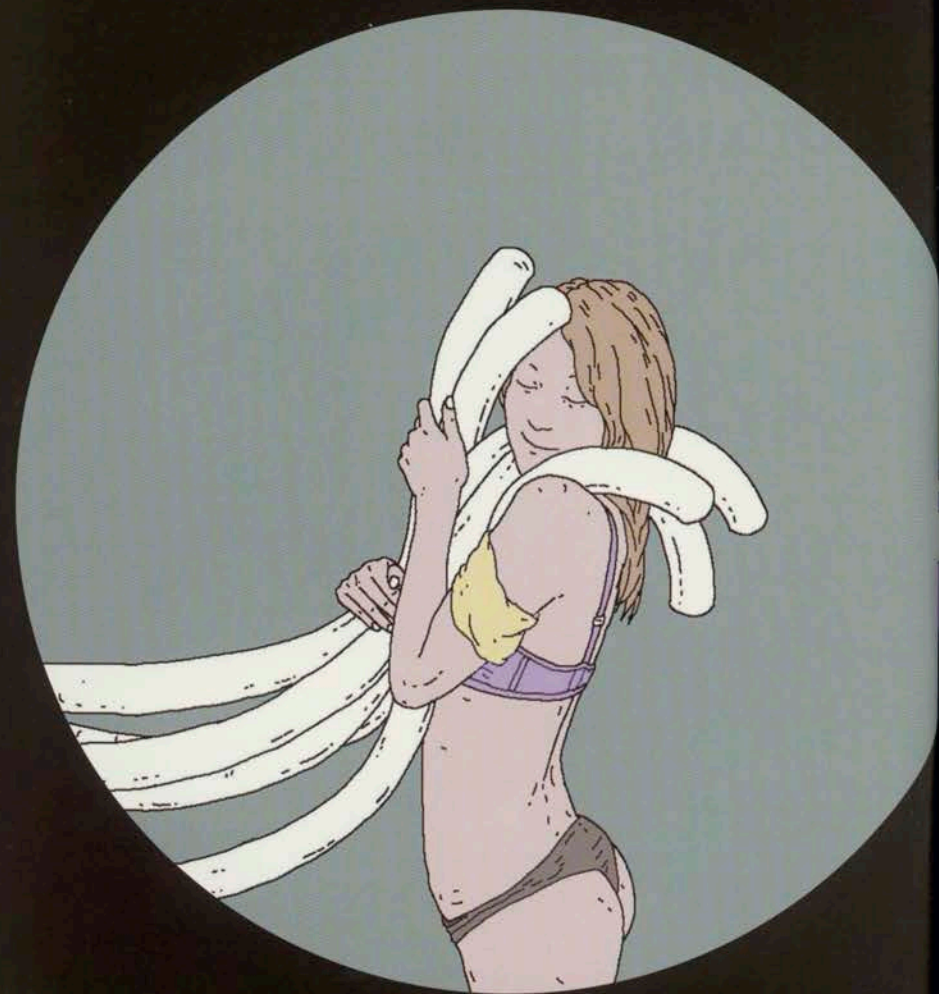
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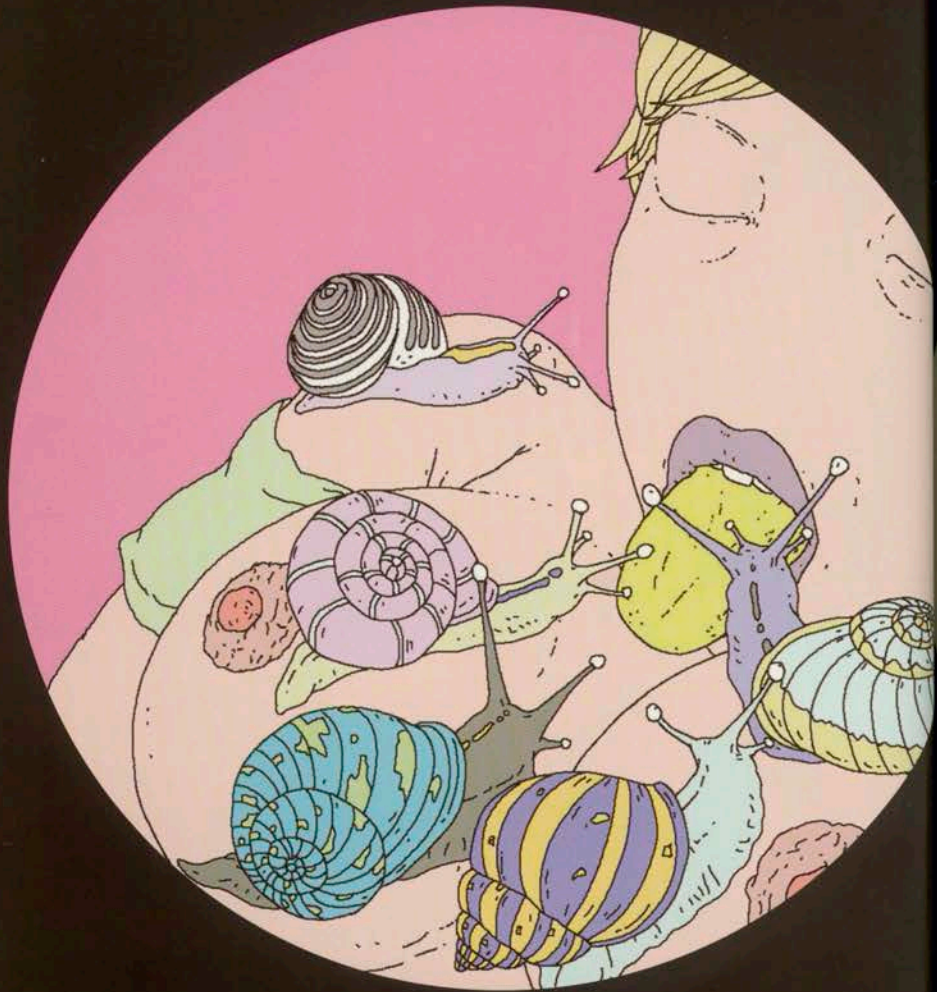






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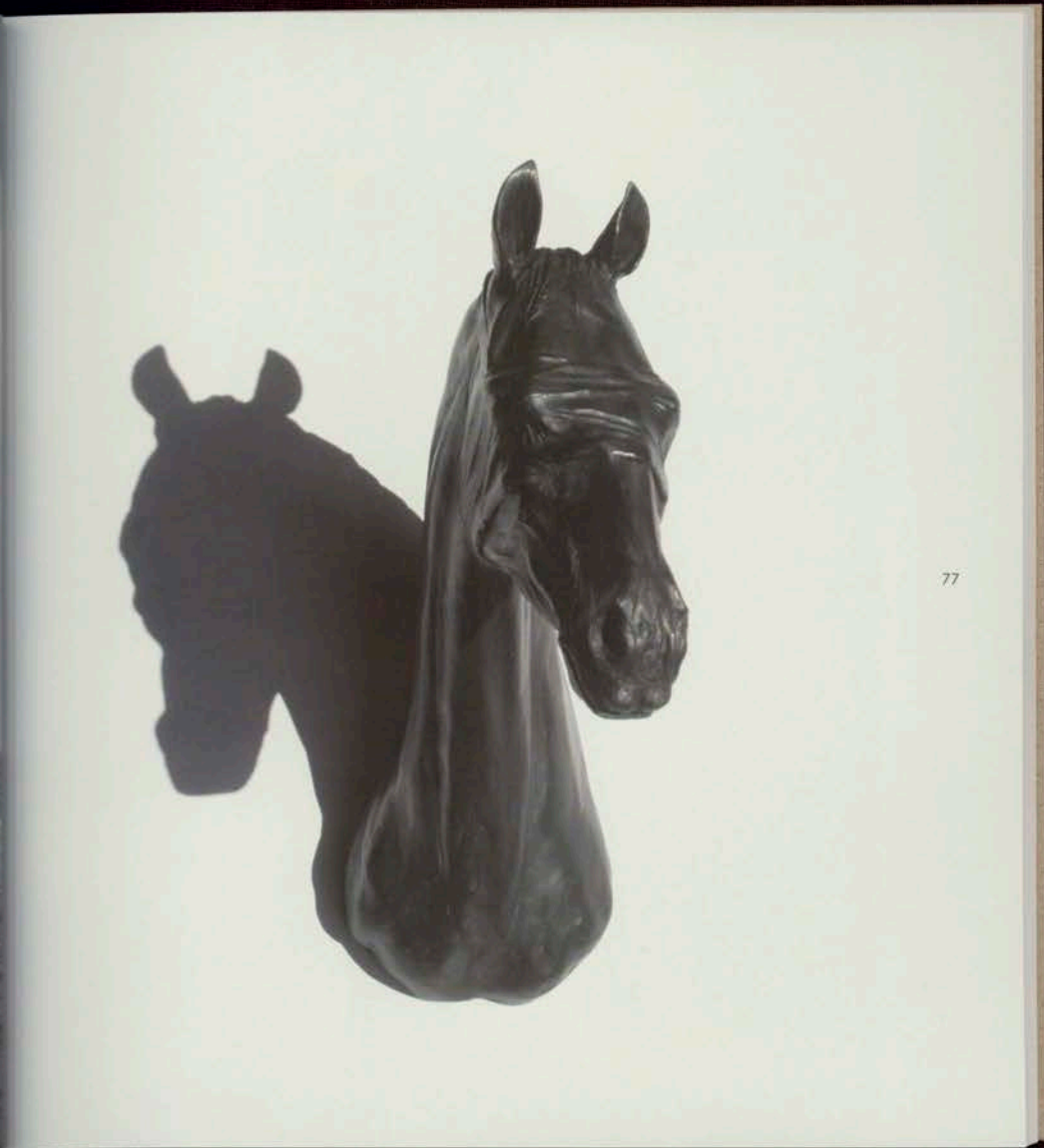
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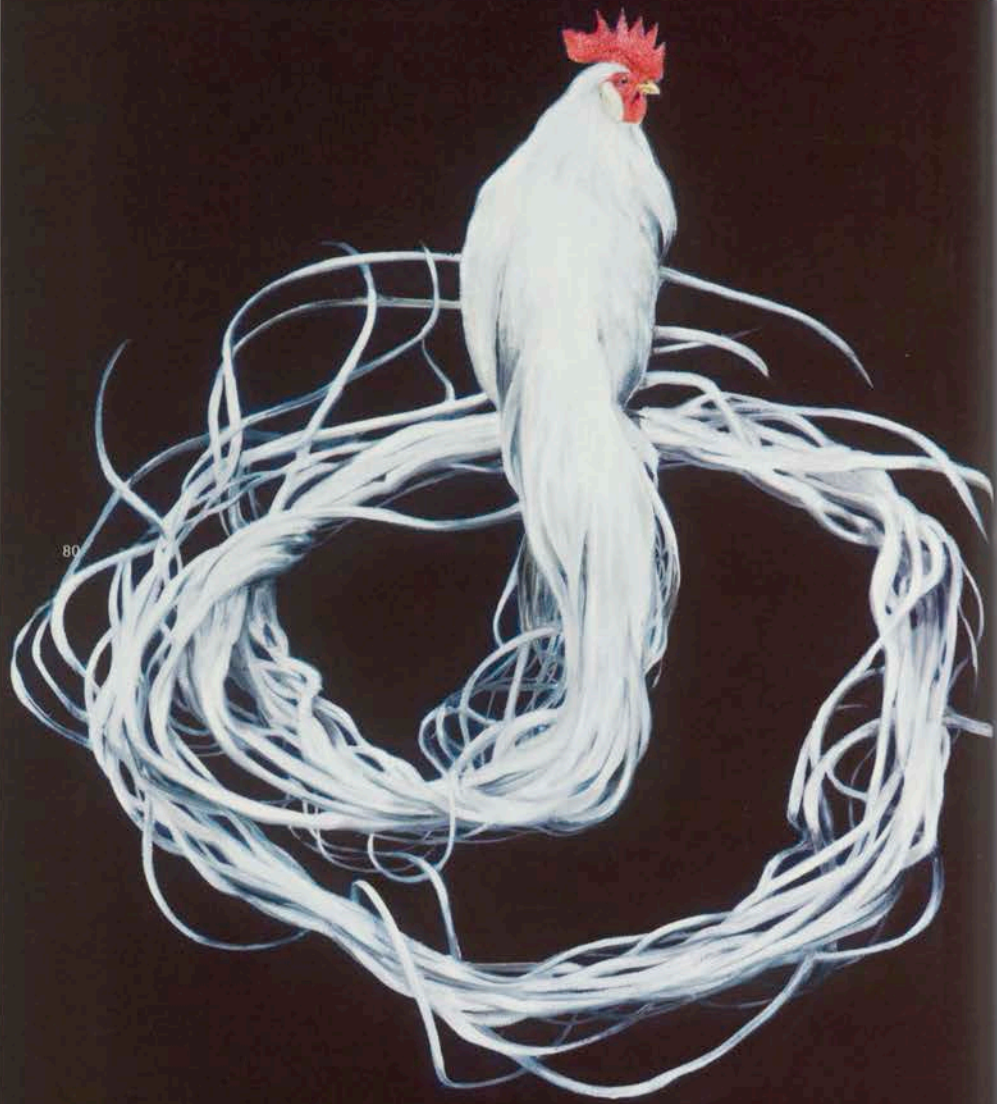
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80

LIST OF WORKS

81

CICADA

KIRSTEN BRADLEY, NICK RITAR
AND BEN FROST

p. 33-35 *Litter*
Animation, sound (13 mins)
2007
Courtesy the artists

FIONA HALL

p. 38-39 *Mire*
Carpet, woolpile on cotton backing
2005
3035 x 2000 mm
Courtesy the artist and Roslyn
Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

p. 36-37 *Mown*
Carex dispacea, carex flagellifera
bronze, phormium Platt's black and
carex testacea
2007
Courtesy the artist.
With special thanks to Te Atiawa,
Ngati Te Whiti and Ngati Te Whiti
Ahi Kaa, Donna Bryant,
Grant Porteous and staff at Parks,
New Plymouth District Council

**INTERPOLAR
TRANSNATIONAL ART
SCIENCE CONSTELLATION**

SASO PODGORSEK

Nanuk
2006
Video, sound (8 mins 26 secs)

THOMAS MULCAIRE

Study for Solaris
2007
Video, sound, (6 mins 28 secs)

**THOMAS MULCAIRE & AMANDA
RODRIGUES ALVES**

National Park
2004 -
Digital video, sound (2 hrs 13 mins)

THOMAS MULCAIRE

p. 40-43 *Groundhog 3*
2007
Plywood, wind turbine,
waste electronic equipment

JEM SQASH

(1ST BORN AKA NTSIKELELO
NTSHINGILA AND ADAM HYDE)

Experiment
2007
Audio track (4 mins 12 secs)

JEM SQASH

(1ST BORN AKA NTSIKELELO
NTSHINGILA AND ADAM HYDE)

Frequency Modulation
2007
Audio track (4 mins 2 secs)

JEM SQASH

(1ST BORN AKA NTSIKELELO
NTSHINGILA AND ADAM HYDE)

South North
2007
Audio track (4 mins 38 secs)

JEM SQASH

(1ST BORN AKA NTSIKELELO
NTSHINGILA AND ADAM HYDE)

Transit
2007
Audio track (4 mins 30 secs)

JEM SQASH

(1ST BORN AKA NTSIKELELO
NTSHINGILA AND ADAM HYDE)

Transmission
2007
Audio track (4 mins 47 secs)

JEM SQASH

(1ST BORN AKA NTSIKELELO
NTSHINGILA AND ADAM HYDE)

V.L.F
2007
Audio track (4 mins 8 secs)

**AMANDA RODRIGUES ALVES AND
REBECCA MATTOS**

Piece for a Solitary Machine
2007
Audio track (6 mins 40 secs)

KURIBAYASHI TAKASHI

p. 49-51 *Wash stand*
Neoprene, acrylic glass, water, plants,
mirror, wash basin
2007
Courtesy the artist

ROSEMARY LAING

p. 52-53

Chris's shed

From 'swanfires' series
C-type photograph
2004
1250 x 2500 mm
Courtesy the artist and Tolarno
Galleries, Melbourne

John and Kathy's Auto Services

From 'swanfires' series
C-type photograph
2004
1050 x 1710 mm
Courtesy the artist and Tolarno
Galleries, Melbourne

Brumby mound #9

From 'One dozen unnatural disasters
in the Australian landscape' series
C-type photograph
2003
1240 x 2500 mm
Courtesy the artist and
GRANTPIRRIE, Sydney

p. 54-55

Burning Ayer #12

From 'one dozen unnatural disasters
in the Australian landscape' series
C-type photograph
2003
800 x 1480 mm
Courtesy the artist and Tolarno
Galleries, Melbourne

LIN TIANMIAO

p. 56-57

Growing

(detail)
C-type photograph
2003
7000 x 500 mm
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery
Collection, New Plymouth

JON McCORMACK

p. 58-59

Universal Zoologies

Video installation, sound
1999
Courtesy the artist

CAROLINE ROTHWELL

p. 61

Lexicon (tomato plant)

Structural PVC
2007
Private Collection, Sydney

Lexicon (Mickey)

Structural PVC
2007
Courtesy the artist and
GRANTPIRRIE, Sydney

Lexicon (pool)

Structural PVC
2007
Courtesy the artist and
GRANTPIRRIE, Sydney

Lexicon (geometric fish)

Structural PVC
2007
Private Collection, Sydney

p. 62

Lexicon (tent)

Structural PVC
2007
Courtesy the artist and
GRANTPIRRIE, Sydney

Lexicon (landscape)

Structural PVC
2007
Paul and Sandra Ferman Collection,
Sydney

Lexicon (moth)

Structural PVC
2007
Patrick and Michelle Holmes
Collection, Sydney

Lexicon (stretched moth)

Structural PVC
2007
Private Collection, Sydney

Lexicon (flying fish)

Structural PVC
2007
Private Collection, Sydney

p. 63

Lexicon (crow)

Structural PVC
2007
Courtesy the artist and
GRANTPIRRIE, Sydney

Lexicon (space)
Structural PVC
2007
Courtesy the artist and
GRANTPIRRIE, Sydney

Lexicon (refinery)
Structural PVC
2007
Courtesy the artist and
GRANTPIRRIE, Sydney

Lexicon (snaking fish)
Structural PVC
2007
Courtesy the artist and
GRANTPIRRIE, Sydney

Lexicon
(stretched bird of prey I)
Structural PVC
2007
Courtesy the artist and
GRANTPIRRIE, Sydney

Lexicon
(stretched bird of prey II)
Structural PVC
2007
Courtesy the artist and
GRANTPIRRIE, Sydney

Lexicon
(stretched bird of prey III)
Structural PVC
2007
Courtesy the artist and
GRANTPIRRIE, Sydney

JOE SHEEHAN

Catch
South Westland pounamu, Canadian
nephrite, South Australian black
jade and Russian nephrite with steel
trace, brass crimps, resin and wood
2006
Hands: 415 x 170 mm,
Stone: 605 x 185 mm
Courtesy the artist, Tim Melville
Gallery and FHE Galleries,
Auckland

Spending Time
South Australian black jade in
marine plywood case, brass hinges
2006
Case: 240 x 240 x 35 mm,
disc diameter: 175 mm
Courtesy the artist and FHE
Galleries, Auckland

p. 67 *Daily Bread*
Black jade, marine plywood
2006
240 x 240 mm
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery
Collection, New Plymouth

p. 64 *Song remains the same*
Canadian nephrite
2005
Private collection

p. 66 *Remote control*
Black Australian jade, quartz crystal
2007
170 x 65 x 26 mm
Courtesy the artist

p. 64-65 *Non-rechargeable*
Various jades, greywacke, sterling
silver
2007
60 x 30 mm x 3, 50 x 25 mm x 3,
50 x 15 mm x 3
Courtesy the artist

TANG MAOHONG

p. 68-71 *Sunday*
5-channel video installation
2006
Courtesy the artist and ShanghART
Gallery, Shanghai

YEE I-LANN

p. 72 *Sulu Stories: High Noon*
Digital print
2005
610 x 610 mm
Courtesy the artist and Valentine
Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur

Sulu Stories: The Archipelago

Digital print
2005
610 x 1830 mm
Courtesy the artist and Valentine
Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur

p. 74-75 *Sulu Stories: Map*

Digital print
2005
610 x 1220 mm
Courtesy the artist and Valentine
Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur

Sulu Stories: Barangay

Digital print
2005
610 x 1830 mm
Courtesy the artist and Valentine
Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur

p. 76 *Sulu Stories:
The Ch'i-lin of Calauit*

Digital print
2005
610 x 610 mm
Courtesy the artist and Valentine
Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur

p. 73 *Sulu Stories: Sarang*

Digital print
2005
610 x 610 mm
Courtesy the artist and Valentine
Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur

YEONDOO JUNG

p. 46 *Location #4*

Colour photograph
2006
1220 x 1540 mm
Courtesy the artist and
Kukje Gallery, Seoul

p. 48 *Location #10*

Colour photograph
2006
1160 x 1760 mm
Courtesy the artist and
Kukje Gallery, Seoul

p. 47 *Location #11*

Colour photograph
2006
1220 x 1550 mm
Courtesy the artist and Kukje
Gallery, Seoul

p. 44 *Location #12*

Colour photograph
2006
1220 x 1560 mm
Courtesy the artist and Kukje
Gallery, Seoul

p. 45 *Location #15*

Colour photograph
2006
1540 x 1220 mm
Courtesy the artist and Kukje
Gallery, Seoul

MICHAEL ZAVROS

p. 77 *Black Ice*

Bronze
2007
300 x 300 x 300 mm
Courtesy the artist

p. 79 *Yves Saint Laurent
Le Smoking/Bay*

Oil on canvas
2006
1950 x 2500 mm
Courtesy the artist and Sophie
Gannon Gallery, Melbourne

Energie T/Chestnut

Oil on board
2006
250 x 300 mm
Nigel Treeliving Collection,
Queensland

p. 78 *Chanel Cardigan/Chestnut*

Oil on board
2005
250 x 300 mm
Nigel Treeliving Collection,
Queensland

p. 80 *White Onagadori*

Oil on board
2006
175 x 175 mm
Private collection, Queensland

I stayed at an estate which is at the last of the cleared ground ... behind us is one vast impenetrable forest. Not a human being within some miles interrupts the solitude – To seat oneself amid the gloom of such a forest on a decaying trunk, and then think of home, is a pleasure worth taking some trouble for ...

Charles Darwin, 1832¹

OUR TERRA NULLIUS

Geoff Park

The track away from the cultured and cultivated that I take most times begins between houses and sidles up a coastal scarp. 'The last of the cleared ground' is, for me no less than for 19th-century travellers, right up against the kind of forest they found themselves calling vast and impenetrable. The first trees I go beneath, though, are big, spreading karaka, the last, lingering trace of the old Māori groves that were tucked out of Cook Strait's wind, among the coastal forest's titoki – until European victuals entered New Zealand with guns, steel and all the rest.

It takes some time before the suburban hum is no longer and the grid of houses and roads below can't be glimpsed through the trees. But soon the only sounds are of birds and of the wind through leaves, and I sense I'm in that great New Zealand space in which, it would seem, no human being interrupts the solitude. Immersed in the 'old primæval grandeur' to which the government about a century ago began 'returning' forests of this ilk.² Face to face with that uniquely New Zealand possibility, an original nature with which, according to the scientific-speak of biodiversity, we did not co-evolve (at least not in any time-frame we can comprehend) and thus cannot coexist.³

Many take this track, and hundreds of others like it that reach beyond New Zealand's cleared ground. I suspect most of the walkers would agree, were they asked, that the colonial surveyor James McKerrow's label captures as well as any the essence of the country they're experiencing: 'the unoccupied wilderness which at best can only be marked by perishable surface-marks'.⁴ Today we are more attuned to the notion that, in one historian's words, country which Māori had clearly occupied

'for hundreds of years prior to the British invasion ... may well have seemed like a "wilderness" to the first British immigrants'.⁵ But, throughout the century or more that separates us from colonial surveyors such as McKerrow, 'wilderness' has maintained a primary position in our landscape language. What was once the terrifying signifier of chaos has become for many a sacred symbol of pristine nature. An 'empty' nature that – because it was 'open to settlement' in the colonial period – was able to be appropriated into the administrative space of 'the nation' in order to preserve the absence of any signs of 'culture'.

Wilderness, in short, is as much a part of the Europeanised vision of New Zealand as the farm and the survey-grid town, and the idea's cultural ancestry is no less specific. Cultural fantasy rather than bedrock ecological reality, the wilderness idea retains psychological and social potency wherever the spread of the West has taken it. Its commodification now parallels that of the city,⁶ to which it has become refuge and foil.

As far as I can discern, it was Elsdon Best who first set out the core experience of wilderness—the-New Zealand-way that the nation now preserves with laws. In 1896, as he was beginning his famed *Tuhoe: Children of the Mist*, the government commissioned him to write a travelogue to attract tourists to Te Urewera's Waikaremoana. 'There comes to all who truly love the face of mother Nature', Best wrote as the journey began, 'the desire to look upon the unwrought wilderness'.⁷ Whether the word on their lips is Best's 'unwrought' or McKerrow's 'unoccupied', more and more people are coming along this track in quest of wilderness. When flights of treated-timber steps began appearing a couple of years ago, part of me accepted them as the necessary consequence of more foot traffic. But other senses miss the old closeness to the ground, the intricate stepping from tree root to tree root.

Flights of quite another kind, the sudden swooping of pigeon wings, the forest's kereru disturbed, offer a different message. Whatever we imagine the forest to be, whoever we believe it belongs to, it's without question theirs: their home. The cultural myths that shape our response to 'the landscape' allege that we humans always belong elsewhere, forbidden from being more than mere movers-through. There is esteem in the new tracks and boardwalks, but they heighten the feeling that we should keep moving. And that is why one day, after pausing at the saddle clearing, I left my ritual route and took a barely discernible defile which I'd long seen but which I had never ventured along. Its course up to a grove of beech forest is as ungrooved as it is overgrown. By the time I'd pushed up to the edge of the trees, I was looking over a corner of country I hadn't seen before.

The American essayist Scott Russell Sanders calls landscape (in one of the finest definitions I know) 'a stretch of earth overlaid with memory, expectation and thought ... what we allow in the doors of perception'.⁸ It is in that regard that he has written, too, of the tingle in the spine, 'even as a boy', when a familiar stretch of country reveals something utterly new.⁹

Since I'd never headed uphill from the saddle, I'd assumed the land beyond it to be wrapped in the same beech forest that clothed everything else that had not been reached by the scorch of settlers' fires. I saw, instead, bright green in the sun, groves of karaka with cabbage trees cavorting among them. The old garden groves, from centuries ago, wrapped over the ridge and down to the gully head, where there stood a kahikatea tree, of the kind called papua for its massive spread, its boughs laden with ferns and lilies and orchids.

Whether they are fragments of worked stone, transported shells or aged karaka trees, encountering old human signs in a landscape from which you have learned

to exclude people is an experience never forgotten. The old garden grove I looked down on from the ridge forest explained the karaka seedlings that I'd seen for years way down the valley where the track crosses the creek. And, knowing the capacity of the other old, valley-bottom kahikatea to attract kereru and tui, I could imagine what an auspicious, birdy place this amalgam of grove and forest would have once been. The sort of place, perhaps, in which Charles Heaphy watched a Te Atiawa birding party spear, with ease, dozens of kererū, across the harbour in 1840. Is this the 'unoccupied wilderness' though?

94 It's an ancient concept, reaching back to times in which people lived surrounded by, and apprehensive of, other animals. But the way we use the term 'wilderness' today derives from the great 18th-century project to systematise nature. Wilderness emerged as a concept of country to assuage imperial eyes, with 'nature' meaning above all regions and ecosystems which were not dominated by Europeans.¹⁰ As Alexander von Humboldt put it in 1814: 'In the Old World, nations and the distinctions of their civilization form the principal points in the picture; in the New World, man and his productions almost disappear amidst the stupendous display of wild and gigantic nature'.¹¹

One distinguishing factor was the ecological state of 18th-century Europe. By the time Europeans began settling America, so rundown were their own original landscapes that they couldn't recognise a healthy human habitat. So intent were the invaders from across the Atlantic on taking possession that they hardly noticed the indigenous signs of resource management, evidence that the land's inhabitants didn't need to cultivate landscape in European ways in order to be sustained by it.¹² 'Wild',

'wilderness', 'waste' was how they labelled any land in which their eyes didn't observe close settlement and well-tended cultivation, or any land that wasn't occupied by people evidently of their equal.

James Cook's voyages brought the wilderness notion to New Zealand. The young naturalist Georg Forster wasn't the only one on the *Resolution* who was relieved to see dark, wooded hills rise out of the southern Pacific Ocean in the autumn of 1773. The crew, he wrote, 'could not but eye the prospect before us with peculiar delight' because they had so 'long and eagerly wished for the land and its vegetable productions': 'so apt is mankind, after a long absence from land, to be prejudiced in favour of the wildest shore, that we looked upon the country at that time as one of the most beautiful in the world.'¹³

Dusky Sound's 'force and beauty of nature' had such 'grandeur' to Forster's eyes that they defied the powers of description. But it was a fragile beauty, vulnerable to closer encounter. The effort of 'clearing away of the woods' for the expedition's tents and observatory quickly 'served to lower the great idea which our people had conceived of this country'. The 'prodigious intricacy' of the forest undergrowth threatened Forster's plans to explore inland:

95 Our excursions into them gave us sufficient grounds for this supposition; for not only the climbing plants and shrubs obstructed our passage, but likewise numbers of rotten trees lay in our way, felled by winds and old age. A new generation of young trees, of parasitic plants, ferns, and mosses sprouted out of the rich mould to which this old timber was reduced by length of time, and a deceitful bark still covered the interior rotten substance ... The animal creation afforded another proof that this country had not undergone any changes from the hands of mankind, and indeed first raised the idea that Dusky Bay was wholly uninhabited.

Thus Forster called Dusky Sound 'antediluvian': 'It is indeed reasonable to suppose', he explained, 'that in the southern parts of New Zealand, the forests have never been touched by human industry but have remained in the rude unimpeded state of nature since their first existence.' His supposition was soon challenged:

We had not been above two days in this bay before we found that our opinion of it being uninhabited was premature. On the 28th in the morning several of our officers went a shooting in a small boat, and on entering a cove two or three miles from the ship, perceived several natives who were about to launch their canoe. The New Zealanders hallooed at their approach, and seeming by this means more numerous than they really were, the officers thought proper to return and acquaint the captain with their discovery.

This observation of New Zealand nearly wasn't made, as Forster knew: 'We might have departed the cove without knowing that it was inhabited, if the natives had not shouted at the discharge of our muskets'.

The 'sly cat on board' the *Resolution* may have revelled in birds so tame they hopped along the barrels of the Forsters' fowling-pieces, but for pastoral animals such as sheep, Dusky Sound had a 'disagreeable circumstance': 'No meadows or lawns are to be met with, and the only flat ground we found was ... where a brook fell into the sea ... But even there, the whole was over-run with woods and briars, and we could not find a single spot of ground which might have afforded pasture ...'

The maps in the *Resolution* cabins were an immeasurable improvement on those used by the 15th-century Europeans who opened the era of overseas expansion.¹⁴ But they still shared a common idea with the earlier imaginary cartography: an inhabitable earth, 'ecumene', to Columbus and co. beyond which lay wilderness. The space where human dwelling (i.e., garden and city) remained impossible

because it was neither subject nor amenable to cultivation (i.e., culture), wilderness was at both the core of the map and its periphery. Wilderness was the beginning and the end of the narrative called History.¹⁵ To a mind so inclined, Dusky Sound was indeed 'antediluvian'.

Many others of Georg Forster's time, surveying the reaches of potentially profitable colonies, would have cursed Dusky's landscape as primeval. And they would have cursed its inhabitants as savages eking out an ephemeral, animal existence, and worthy of no better. Forster had no doubt that Dusky had 'hitherto lain plunged in one long night of ignorance and barbarianism' – until the *Resolution* brought 'the rise of arts and the dawn of science'.¹⁶ However, Forster admired the inhabitants' sense of themselves when confronted with danger: 'The courage of these people has something singular in it, for it should seem that in spite of their inferiority of force, they cannot brook the thought of hiding themselves, at least not until they have made an attempt to establish an intercourse, or prove the principles of the strangers who approach them.'¹⁷

Given Dusky's 'numerous islands, and harbours, and mazy forests upon them', it would have been impossible, Forster reckoned, 'to have found out the family which we saw on the Indian island, if they had not discovered themselves, and thus made the first advances'. A handful of natives on the shore, their occupancy of the country too slight to create signs discernible to the Europeans sailing past, they needed to signal their presence. Yet Forster admired the human life that lived in a place that to his eyes was so demonstrably unhuman, and he admired, too, their genius in revealing themselves only when it was their choice to do so.

Just as he characterised the tangata whenua of Dusky Sound as courageous rather than miserable, Forster presented its 'wildest shore' as 'one of the most beautiful

in the world', attributing its beauty to its being only slightly 'touched by human industry'. Most importantly, perhaps, Forster recognised the limitation on conveying this beauty with words, admitting that only 'by the pencil of Mr Hodges' could such a scene be 'truly imitated'.

Forster's writings made him famous. They also made him a mentor and close friend of the celebrated Alexander von Humboldt, 'the most creative explorer of his time'. Humboldt's fame derived from his voluminous, rhapsodic portrayals of what he prosaically called – and what every ecological scientist learns to ascertain – the 'certain physiognomy of nature exclusively peculiar to each region of the earth'.¹⁸ His compelling ambition in contemplating 'nature in all its variety of wild and stupendous scenery' was to blend science's sensing of the particular with an aesthetic sense of the whole of nature.

The scientist in Humboldt wanted to see the land unadulterated by Western man. 'Free nature', he called it. 'Each region has its peculiar and characteristic beauty', he declared.¹⁹ A good wilderness picture was one that could 'apprehend these characteristics, and reproduce them visibly' – but without the conventions of making it 'picturesque'. No ruined temples or ramparts or rustics. The effect was singular. In its beholding of the New World's 'stupendous display of wild and gigantic nature', Humboldt's imperial eye engulfed and miniaturised humanity.

The most decisive experience of Humboldt's youth was when Forster took him to London in 1790 to meet the famed Joseph Banks and to see the specimens and material gathered on the Cook voyages – Hodges's Dusky Sound paintings and sketches not least among them. Integral to Hodges's landscape art was the

experience of each scene, drawn or painted directly from nature for 'men of science', and free from the mannered, stylistic devices that mattered to the 'men of taste'. This revelation of art's power to convey the botanical, geological and climatic character of each new wilderness dazzled Humboldt, who years later included Hodges in his canon of wilderness masters.

Anxious to experience for himself 'the savage beauties of a country guarded by mountains and shaded by ancient forests',²⁰ Humboldt embarked for South America. The book that resulted from this journey would hugely influence Europeans' perception of 'nature' beyond Europe – and help shape what many Europeans (the great Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace among them) believed to be their privileged right to experience it. Humboldt's *Personal Narratives of Travel* was the book of which Darwin said his 'whole course of life is due to having read and re-read as a youth'. Acknowledging that 'the force of impressions generally depends on preconceived ideas', Darwin confessed that his 'were taken from the vivid descriptions in the Personal Narrative of Humboldt, which far exceed in merit anything else which I have read'.²¹

Darwin didn't actually like much of the Beagle voyage. The 'evils' experienced in 'beholding various countries and the many races of mankind' outweighed the pleasures gained. On 'the brighter side', 'decidedly ... the most constant and highest source of enjoyment' was 'beholding the scenery' – 'a growing pleasure ... which to a certain degree is distinct from admiring its beauty'. At the voyage's end, Darwin said that of all the scenes that were 'deeply impressed on my mind':

none exceed in sublimity the primæval forests undefaced by the hand of man; whether those of Brazil, where the powers of Life are predominant, or those of Tierra del Fuego, where Death

and Decay prevail. Both are temples filled with the varied productions of the God of Nature: – no one can stand in these solitudes unmoved, and not feel there is more in man than the mere breath of his body.²²

Despite Humboldt's emphasis on primal nature, in all his travels he never once stepped beyond the outposts of the Spanish colonial infrastructure. But that's not the point, really. The European quest for grand primeval scenes had begun. The idea that Humboldt developed from Forster's and Hodges's encounters with faraway regions of true, original nature like Dusky Sound, and that so empowered Darwin, was soon being pursued by myriad 19th-century tourists. (Early in the next century, the government of 'the scenic paradise of the world' would provide for it by preserving 'samples of the primæval scenery that existed ... at the advent of European occupation', as Prime Minister Massey called them.²³)

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Had the *Beagle* sought out Dusky Sound rather than the Bay of Islands, Darwin's sense of New Zealand – and its rather vital role in *The Origin of Species* – might have been very different. As his evolutionary theory enlivened Victorian science, it permeated colonial New Zealand society and informed the transformers and 'acclimatisers' of Aotearoa that, if they weren't careful to 'preserve' the unique life forms of New Zealand's primeval scenery, Europe's superior life forms would soon see them vanishing.

Victorian science didn't need Charles Darwin's theory to tell it that New Zealand's animals and plants made this a unique land. Inaugurating the New Zealand Institute in 1868, the governor, Sir George Bowen, quoted Hochstetter's *Geology of New Zealand*. The *Geology*, published in English translation the previous year, had first appeared in Germany in 1863, just four years after the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*.

To Hochstetter, the 'wilderness' was where 'the virgin soil lay; what the enterprising settler has but to battle with and subdue ... to reap the never-failing fruits of his labour'. But it was also the 'interior' where 'New Zealand has fully preserved ... the originality and peculiarity of its remarkable animal and vegetable kingdoms up to our present time. No monuments of any kind, no tombs of kings, no ruins of cities, no time-honoured fragments of shattered palace domes and temples, are there to tell of the deeds of ages or nations past and gone'.²⁴

Another scientist of sorts, William Swainson, had written in 1859 that 'forests in the wildest part of the country have their claimants ... there is no part of it, however lonely, of which they do not know the native owners'.²⁵

But the great weight of settler opinion found it more convenient to agree with Hochstetter's idea of a primeval land 'not inhabited, probably, till within late centuries of the history of man, and then but thinly populated, and only along the coasts and along the banks of navigable rivers'.²⁶

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New Zealand didn't provide any of Darwin's favourite scenes. His observations of its indigenous flora and fauna, and their overwhelming by Europe's 'superior forms', were based on the few days he spent in the Bay of Islands in 1835. From the absence of native grasses he could tell immediately that the 'uninhabited useless country' which New Zealand's savages had converted to fern had been – and recently – 'aboriginally covered with forest-trees'. This was the New Zealand he called to mind years later when he wrote in *The Descent of Man* (1871) how civilised nations' cultivation of the land will be fatal in many ways to savages, for they cannot, and will not change their ways'.

We will never know whether Dusky's people might have shown themselves to the *Beagle's* telescopes, or decided against it. Darwin, no doubt, would have recalled his 'astonishment, as he did in another far-southern shore, '... at the first sight in his native haunt of a barbarian – of man in his lowest and most savage state'. He'd have

put Dusky's Māori in the same wild bunch as the Fuegians who'd cried out from a 'savage land covered to the water by one dense gloomy forest'.²⁷

In one sense, Darwin simply viewed such 'savages' with the same supreme contempt as did almost all Europeans in the 1830s. In another, though, the *Beagle's* adventures were part of an abiding fascination with the extent of 'difference between savage and civilised man'. Well into the 19th century, European international law allowed the people of 'civilised' European nations like Darwin's to claim the land occupied by 'savages' by right of discovery. It called the doctrine by which it disregarded native customary tenure and usufruct systems *terra nullius*, the Latin term for land seemingly without people.

If New Zealanders' wilderness-preserving impulse has a true birth it is in the Victorians' application of Darwin's idea of 'Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life' (as *The Origin of Species* is subtitled). Its midwife, so to speak, was the colonial fraternity which believed what science told it: that New Zealand's 'primitive' indigenous life would go progressively extinct in front of their eyes. One of that fraternity's most influential figures, the gentleman-naturalist Walter Buller, indeed called himself a 'disciple of Darwin'.

The way in which New Zealand's laws of the land preserve the primeval, 'original' nature of the landscape as wilderness, and at the same time provide for recreational solitude, owes not a little to Darwin. His passion for 'primæval forests undefaced by the hand of man' (imperialist adventurism, an American academic has called it.²⁸) might not be explicit in his evolutionary theory but was seminal in its conception.

'A wild tribe of Māoris' was reported still to inhabit one of Dusky's inner inlets in the 1870s. By the 1890s their whenua's 'scenic power' was seducing Humboldt's followers with government pamphlets guaranteeing that 'nowhere within the same compass can America show such a successive variety of sublime sights, so countless an array of stupendous marvels'. As an Australian newspaper supplement on Fiordland put it, 'visitors ... miss the Māori life that must have been a feature of more than ordinary interest in the days of the early explorers, but the wonderful scenery is still there'.²⁹ And as well as seducing tourists to visit 'the sublime fiords', the government was responding to urgings that 'in the interest of science, it is most desirable to establish one or more reserves where the native flora and fauna of New Zealand may be preserved from destruction'. In 1891, it declared the big island named after the ship that had brought Forster to Dusky a sanctuary.³⁰

Congratulating the colony on initiating the idea – 'even in this eleventh hour' – the conservationist and future Prime Minister Thomas Mackenzie attributed the Resolution Island sanctuary to 'the sons of New Zealand, who see more grace in the lustrous tui than in the British crow ... But two years later he was still having to move in Parliament that 'in order to conserve our beautiful forests and preserve our rare native birds in the fiords and lakes country' – not least from tourists – the government should be appointing people on the ground.³¹

Mackenzie mounted expeditions to check out Fiordland. He kept his eyes peeled for the last 'remnants of the lost Ngatimamoe tribe ... it has been supposed ... might be met with', but saw 'no trace of them'. Amidst a primeval grandeur in which human life was so manifestly ephemeral, their fate was of little consequence anyway. Mackenzie's objective was to see 'the beautiful and graceful birds' that 'brightened our woods ... when the pākehā first arrived in New Zealand; before the great influx

of strangers, strangers with no eye to admire, and no ear to be enchanted with the native inhabitants of our forest primæval'.³²

About seven years before the government declared Resolution Island a sanctuary, it 'turned out' on Crown land in Otago four hundred ferrets it had imported from England to control 'the rabbit menace'. In subsequent years hundreds of weasels and stoats were also released in a programme of introductions that went on until 1897. Knowing that flightless birds such as kakapo could not co-exist with such predatory animals for long, Richard Henry, the sanctuary's caretaker, transferred any Fiordland kakapo he could find to Resolution and Dusky's smaller islands. Then, early in 1900, a schooner of tourists brought Henry the news that he said so 'spoil my plans here and upset everything'. They had seen a weasel pursuing a weka along one of Resolution's beaches. By 1907, Henry had killed a ferret at Cascade Cove and seen weasel and ferret tracks in Breaksea Sound and Chalky Inlet. The tourist hunting parties, whose camps he found littered with kākā and kererū feathers, told him of many more.

When *Resolution* and the other Dusky islands stocked by Richard Henry were searched in 1980, not a sign of kakapo was seen. In the whole of Fiordland, only a few male birds were found. One of the five flown to faraway, predator-free Maud Island in the Marlborough Sounds was given Richard Henry's name.

Richard Henry kakapo lived into our new millennium. Indeed, I heard on the radio as I was writing this piece that, courtesy of Air New Zealand, he was heading back south. One fraternity of the whole system of people devoted to him and his fellow kakapo had kept him vigilantly out of predators' reach. Another had learned how to rid islands of predators and had kept a small one in Dusky Sound predator-free for two years. Richard Henry could be taken home.

THE CARE OF SMALL BIRDS A CENTURY AFTER THE LAST HUIA FLEW

New Zealanders have as profound a reason as any people to be mindful of the desire that Barry Lopez says aches in all neo-European cultures: the wish that, our colonial conquests of the human and natural world finally at an end, we will find our way back to a more equitable set of relationships with all we have subjugated.³³ We have still to deal with the sense of loss that comes with knowing this particular history of ours. But we also live in times of greater possibility than ever for that equity we desire.

Bereft of its browsing moa, stocked with predatory stoats and weasels instead of hurtling eagles, the 'original' ecosystem we'd like to preserve is an ecosystem that hasn't existed before. But one of the ironies of the preservationist campaign is the intense human effort needed first to keep alive many of the life forms that flourished before the arrival of people and the pillaging animals brought with us, and then to restore the life forms to their home ecosystem. Precious and protected (away from us) in their island sanctuaries, kakapo and takahē have become something more than a nation's taonga. The recovery and the repair of their ecosystems are becoming expressions of who and what we are culturally. In the century between Richard Henry's despairing departure from Dusky Sound and his namesake kakapo's return, New Zealanders have founded a whole new culture of kinship with the species of birds that their cavalier – and direly human – colonial ways took to the brink of extinction.

As well as the massive financial collateral the nation has begun committing to the possibilities of keeping kakapo extant and restored to their whenua, a lot of human heart has been invested in the process. Deep connections have been formed with the

other life that New Zealand has made possible; an amalgam that the human Richard Henry perceived but for which his colonial culture wasn't ready. A friend of mine was the first to see, as a halo in a Maglite beam, the fluffed-up down of a newly born kakapo chick – a signal that human-assisted kakapo breeding was possible. She continues to speak of it, years later, in a kind of love language; with aroha, no less. She's as mindful of the welfare of the precious birds with which she co-inhabits New Zealand as of her own. Her regard for kakapo and titi is an artist's, but, reaching through the fraternities of avian conservation and muttonbirders, it permeates her life. The same domain of regard for whenua, dare I say, as the artist Jacqueline Fraser evokes in her paean to an ancestral kainga:

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And she covered her face lightly with the brush of the albatross.
And she smothered her eyes grimly with the glimpse of the kakapo.
And she pursed her lips sourly with the taste of the titi.
And she closed her heart firmly with the poroporo crying.
And she hid her thighs closely with the parapara falling.
And she raised her song shyly with the ti-tree sighing.
And she grasped her hope sadly with the kowhai falling ...³⁴

Pakeha commonly perceive the Māori relationship with land as being more intimate and more natural than their own. Native land rights, however, have been notoriously difficult for the Western colonial culture to accept in New Zealand. Very rarely has that umbilical connection with 'the glimpse of the kakapo' and 'the taste of the titi' been admitted to the legal schemes the nation has devised to protect and sustain the indigenous life of the land. Native land has been returned to its 'primæval grandeur'. 'Wilderness areas', in which 'the flora and fauna are interfered with as

little as possible', have been created in order to make Edens that can be subsequently visited, and described as if they were still devoid of human occupation, in a state before people. But in another sense, they are whenua from which Māori have been detached, and their customary attachments to them, collapsed.

As Richard Henry struggled in vain to preserve Dusky Sound's kakapo from weasels and ferrets, the celebrated huia slid into extinction. Hunting huia was made illegal just as the bird vanished, in a cascade of laws protecting native birds, preserving native scenery and neutering native custom. The law makers were not uninfluenced by the anxious warnings that, unless the 'scenic paradise of the world' were very careful, the devastation going on in the name of agricultural settlement would see tourists and their money going elsewhere. Most of them believed too that the Māori race was in terminal decline, and that there'd soon be no Māori culture, customary or otherwise. By 1910, when the Māori population had begun to recover from its traumatic nineteenth century, English laws had removed any customary association with the flora and fauna that had sustained the culture before European settlement.³⁶

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Wilderness is an eminently progressive ideal in the minds of those who have regard for nature; for others it's an oppressive force that erases and denies them access to their history.³⁷ By emptying the land of people, and leading us to imagine the world without us – nature in its primal state – wilderness, as the Australian historian Tom Griffiths has observed, is an escape from history.³⁸ It is also, as his compatriot the socio-ecologist Peter Dwyer has said, a prime example of Western thought mistaking the periphery for the primal.³⁹ The problem is compounded in Aotearoa New Zealand when the state and conservation movements attempt to sanctify places they see as primal by ejecting people from nature.

It is this sense of loss – of ravaged whenua and collapsed custom, along with stolen waterways and vanished birds – that has driven some Māori to lodge the treaty Claim to the Indigenous Flora and Fauna with the Waitangi Tribunal. Among the claimants' specific grievances is the Crown's historical 'creation of "reserves" for the "protection" of species of flora and fauna'. Paralleling this is concern with 'the loss and alienation from Māori of the ecosystems of these flora and fauna' and 'the gazetting and establishment of "protected species" by the Crown in denial of the concept of kaitiakitanga which is implicit in rangatiratanga'.⁴⁰ But I suspect it was the prospect of Māori claiming ownership of the species – *kererū* among them – in which the claim was couched that immediately had leaders of the Pākehā conservation movement declaring how 'audacious, extravagant ... and completely unacceptable' it was.⁴¹

108 One of the first submissions to the Waitangi Tribunal concerning the claim came from a Pākehā plant scientist. He considered 'the idea that any species of plant on this earth can be the property of any one group of people ... totally repugnant and arrogant'. Implementing the claim, he added, would be 'the ultimate expression of contempt for the environment by *Homo sapiens*'.⁴²

The claimants' argument is that they are simply claiming rights that the treaty's second article guaranteed. From what I have been able to discern, 'ownership' – a very different matter from rights – only has become an issue because, under the laws of England that shape New Zealanders' landscape, the Crown, in making reserves and preserving birds for the nation, has assumed title.

One of the things about New Zealand that I'd like to know more about right now is why the Treaty of Waitangi's second article came to be. William Hobson had instructions to recognise local land ownership. Nevertheless, the treaty article about

forests and whenua and rangatiratanga was a last-minute insertion, only there, the historian Judith Binney says, because James Busby persuaded Hobson that, without it, he'd have no treaty.⁴³ None of the chiefs assembled at Waitangi, and threatening to leave, were going to sign, it would seem, unless Hobson came up with a text that acknowledged and upheld the Māori relationships to the land and its resources.

Before they signed on 6 February 1840, many of the chiefs spoke bitterly of how much of their whenua had vanished from them already. 'Is not the land already gone?' asked Tamati Waaka Nene. 'Is it not covered with men, with strangers, foreigners – even as the grass and herbage – over who we have no power?'⁴⁴ Busby himself had written in much the same vein, just three years earlier when the land seemed to be flying out of Māori hands: 'the Natives ... conclude that the God of the English is removing the aboriginal inhabitants to make room for them'. It appeared to Busby that 'this impression has produced amongst them a very general recklessness and indifference to life'.⁴⁵

109 But if there was going to be a treaty there were still forests in which something Māori survived and whose future could be secured. Whereas Charles Darwin found the Bay of Islands' *aruhe fernlands* 'desolate', his one-time travelling companion Augustus Earle considered this to be 'where the finest examples of the human race are to be found, the largest and finest timber grows'.⁴⁶ One village, 'literally buried in a forest', was near 'one of the most beautiful wooded valleys' that Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas McDonnell could remember. About the time the Treaty of Waitangi was being signed and the miro trees were ripe, he went into the Waikahanganui valley with a *rōpū kaiwhakangau* [hunting party]. Laying about five kilometres of the valley floor with snares, the old men placed it under strict tapu:

... in fact, it was never thought that anyone could have dreamt it possible to go to places of this kind, not being one of the tribe, and death would have followed to a certainty anyone who so transgressed tribal rights. The usual take, or harvest, of birds in one month, during the full fruiting of the miro in its season, was from 4500 to 5000 birds, such as pigeon, parrots and tui; but even in my time, when I was a youngster, I used to accompany old Toenga Pou, when he went out bird-snaring to this valley, and have helped to lift between 300 and 400 birds from the few hundred yards of the stream he had prepared ...⁴⁷

Landscapes exist in people's heads just as much as they exist as views, or stretches of country. Now, whenever I hear a kererū in flight, it's in Thomas McDonnell's most beautiful wooded valley that I imagine it. Magnified a hundredfold, in flock flight through the trees. The next time I walked in my local wilderness, it was this possibility of a forest of birds and of people who knew it from an older and more intimate and less rational association that sent me on a detour to the karaka grove. I was prepared for the step from wild forest to garden grove, but not for the sense of people. I sat beneath one of the karaka they'd planted, looking down through a century or more of undergrowth where they had opened the old forest right down and around the old papua kahikatea.

One of the first tourist guides the New Zealand government published when it began declaring stretches of country primeval wilderness asked the interesting question: 'if it be true that the character of a people is largely determined by their natural surroundings, what manner of man ought the future New Zealander to be ... nurtured on the ennobling scenery of our island home?'⁴⁸ The karaka grove I found on my walk in the wild looks as though history has passed it by. Forgotten it. But, during a century of change, our island home's ennobling scenery has certainly changed us. And, if it has nurtured us, it hasn't enamoured us of the notion that the birds of the wild can have human owners.

By opening the box of history and revealing the shattering of whenua to be an integral part of the colonising process, the Tai Tokerau kuia who initiated the Claim to the Indigenous Flora and Fauna have begun a questioning that had to come. But it is this sense of the wild preciously preserved 'out there', implanted in the New Zealand psyche by European imperialism, which I suspect is going to give the kuia great difficulty in persuading the rest of us of what one of them, Haana Murray, calls Māori habitat.⁴⁹ And of any restoration of customary 'rights' therein.

I can imagine being in Toenga Pou's kai whakangau, heading home laden with bird meat, because I can imagine the forest ecosystem that so sustained it. I can't see it because it is an ecosystem no longer with us. But watching the kererū I know feeding in the old kahikatea, watching what Gary Snyder calls 'the insouciant freedom of wild creatures', it is difficult, for me, to see them as 'ownable' in any way. This glimpse of their independence is possible only because I've grown up in a culture that has encouraged the birds' wild living, preserving something at least of their world before us.

Modernity has turned New Zealand into two landscapes. Both were conceived aboard the ships of European exploration in the moment when New Zealand became an inevitability. These two landscapes have equal power in shaping New Zealanders' sense of themselves. In the one in which most of us live, one of humanity's most dramatic transformations of nature anywhere has removed indigenous life almost entirely. The other one, in which our living is prohibited, is still as solidly indigenous as anywhere on Earth, and as devoid of humans; maintained as though it were the world without us. Our *terra nullius*, no less.

Modernity brought to Aotearoa a view of the world that severs humans and human activity from their place in nature. It has meant that few of us have much direct

experience of wild nature any more. But since the government began employing the view to preserve wilderness, New Zealand has protected from human occupation, in its indigenous state, a higher proportion of the nation's lands than almost any other country. The endeavour has built a sense of country in the national psyche. We know that, beyond the domesticated order of suburbs and farms, there is feral, wild space not far away from any of us. It may be country of which we often hear bad news on TV news – of people lost or imperilled – and we may not all agree with so much of it having been made into 'wilderness areas' in which 'the flora and fauna are interfered with as little as possible'.³⁰ But this preservation of wilderness, under the aegis of the Queen's Crown, has had, I'm sure, huge influence on our growing regard for that flora and fauna – and our sense of who we are in a globalizing world.

As we have begun to learn how Aotearoa's wild birds and their trees must live, we have acquired a regard for their welfare that was not possible in the colony of the 1890s when the preserving of the indigenous began. And, as we have begun to belong, we have begun to accept that if the country that we have set aside for solace is claimable at all, it is by its inhabiting fauna more than its human visitors.

- 1 Charles Darwin, letter to Frederick Watkins from Monte Video, River Plata, 18 August 1832. In Frederick Burkhardt and Sydney Smith, eds., *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, vol. 1, 1985, p. 261).
- 2 James McKenzie, 'Report by Commissioners of Crown Lands on the Preservation of Native Forests (Taranaki)', *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1901, C-13B, p. 8.
- 3 Simon Upton, in *New Zealand Books*, December 1996, pp. 15-17.
- 4 James McKerrow, *Reminiscences*, transcribed by Mervyn Rodgers, 1997, Hocken Library, Misc-MS-1430.
- 5 Giselle Byrnes, *Boundary Markers: Land Surveying and the Colonisation of New Zealand* (Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2001).

- 6 Denis Cosgrove, *Habitable Earth: Wilderness, Empire, and Race in America*. In David Rothenberg, ed., *Wild Ideas* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 39.
- 7 Ebdon Best, *Waikare-Moana, The Sea of Rippling Waters: The Lake; The Land; The Legends With a Tramp Through Tuhoe Land*. Government Printer, Wellington, 1897, p. 1.
- 8 Scott Russell Sanders, *Hunting for Hope: A Father's Journey* (Beacon, Boston, 1998, p. 7).
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