

(Un)conditional

Ayesha Green,
Cushla Donaldson,
Eve Armstrong,
Gabby O'Connor,
and Rob Hood

Curated by Sarah McClintock and Jamie Hanton

18 March - 27 May 2018

THE PHYSICS ROOM
CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

(II) The Suter Art Gallery
The Physics Room

(Un)conditional II

The *(Un)conditional* series of exhibitions explores the concepts of hosting, being a guest, trade, exchange, reciprocity, utu and manaakitanga. The artists involved examine the conditions that shape cultural, legal, commercial, familial, and educational relationships, whether these are explicit, implicit, above board or sub rosa.

Rob Hood's trio of works, which include two braziers and one smoker, speak to a DIY ideal, as well as the history of the art object. The brazier's origins are tied to both function and ritual and, significantly, each of the objects in the exhibition is fully operable. There is something provisional in Hood's use of scrap metals, yet they are treated with care and through subtle modifications transcend pure functionality. In this way, Hood's objects have one foot in the sacred sphere of exalted object and one in the profane. These dual purposes existed in harmony in traditional contexts thanks to the inextricable and embodied nature of ritual in daily life rather than the separate ways in which they are perceived and experienced in contemporary society. The works play with conditions we accept when we enter an art gallery: do not touch, do not run, do not yell. Fire is especially potent here: imagine lighting the brazier in the hallowed hall of art.

In Hood's work, different types of labour—and their associated values—are brought to the fore. The aesthetic work of the artist filtered through the applied creativity of the product designer and the ingenuity of the inventor. Each of those designations comes with its own value proposition; its own way of adding immaterial value to the material world.

Cushla Donaldson's *composite for a happiness that forgets nothing* extends this conversation around labour and exchange. Donaldson's multi-media work operates as a love letter to an old friend, which, via personal narrative, explores the complex mechanisms of capitalism and its undeniable global influence, as Keti Chukrov has written,

As labor is dematerialized and the division of labor in industrial production erodes, capital not only occupies the working hours during which products or goods (and its surplus value) are produced; it absorbs all of the worker's time, as well as his or her existence, thoughts, and creative desires. Products or goods are produced not to be consumed, to be swallowed directly, but as a set of new modes of communication, knowledge, languages, or even worlds.¹

The setting for Donaldson's ode is the cruise ship—a microcosm of the global economy as we know it. The division of labour on the cruise ship mirrors 'real world' geopolitical divisions, with the hard manual labour occurring out of sight; just as multinational corporations contract their manufacturing to factories that exist outside of Western consciousness, the lower decks occupied by the cleaners and menial workers are often completely sealed-off from the passenger classes. Operating under maritime law, cruise lines enjoy a relatively unregulated existence and are able to obtain a virtual tax-free status by incorporating their business in countries like Panama or Bermuda and flying foreign-flags of convenience.²

The video projected onto the 'palm' of the aluminium composite hand glitches through the grandiose ship slipping between found promotional footage that name checks luxury materials such as marble and crystal and footage of Donaldson's friend, a recognised and celebrated cruise ship singer and dancer educated at Nelson Girls College, as she discusses her upbringing and job. As a troupe sing 'Diamonds are a girl's best friend', time seems to slow and twist; the performance engulfing the entire space.

We enter the gallery in the middle of a performance of the haka; literally in the middle of a challenge. The space in-between the New Zealand All Blacks and the English rugby team is charged, almost as it is on a marae during a powhiri where tangata whenua

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(II) The Suter Art Gallery
The Physics Room

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THE SUTER ART GALLERY
TE ARATOI O WHAKATŪ

Christchurch City Council

Resene
the paint the professionals use

signtech
the signmasters

THE CRATER RIM

three boys

creative nz
ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND TOI AOTEAROA

(Un)conditional design by Blue Monday Collective

welcome manuhiri (visitors) through a call and response ritual. Ayesha Green's *Meeting Grounds* references the fact that the first game of rugby played in New Zealand in 1870 took place at The Botanics in Nelson. *The Prow*, the Nelson and Tasman Libraries website, calls the match the "birth of a New Zealand tradition".³ Although that match was contested by Nelson College and Nelson Football Club, the significance of the teams in Green's work is tied to the colonising process that occurred both before and after Te Tiriti o Waitangi was signed in 1840, and the ongoing, and complex, formation of nationalism that is wedded to the game of rugby in New Zealand. Each time the haka is performed by The All Blacks, national identity is simultaneously being referenced and formed. This relationship became further complicated during the era of professionalisation in the 1990s when Adidas became the All Black's primary sponsor and embarked on an intensive marketing campaign that relied on the use of the haka and imagery of Māori warriors. By simplifying and flattening the figures, Green attempts to disarm the notion of representation as an instrumentalising tool used to verify cultural essentialism and move product.

Eve Armstrong's ongoing project *Trading Table* possesses a visual language of its very own. The collaged signs and fluoro stock speak to a yard sale-cum-High Street vernacular. Embodying a kind of currency converter, Armstrong eschews market value for a more personal manifestation of worth, dealing in multiple currencies including ideas, information, skills, services, and items. The locations of *Trading Table* have traversed public spaces such as Queen Street and Westfield Mall in Auckland to the semi-public spaces of contemporary art fairs such as Spring 1883 in the boutique Sydney hotel The Establishment in 2017.

Armstrong will operate the table during the opening weekend of *(Un)conditional II* at The Suter Art Gallery (17 & 18 March), and following the performance the pasted-up walls will be relocated into the gallery space. *Trading Table* creates geographic points of connection throughout the year for The Physics Room as trades from the table's last location carry-over to its next location—trades not completed in Nelson will travel to Ashburton in August as part of *(Un)conditional IV*.

Also based on personal exchange, Gabby O'Connor's ongoing project *The Unseen* is a result of a collaborative making workshop delivered by O'Connor and Dr Joe O'Callaghan, a physical oceanographer from the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA). The workshop was undertaken by makers who were part of *handshake 4* at Toi Pōneke in Wellington—a project that supports New Zealand jewellery artists, allowing them to develop ideas and artworks for a succession of national and international exhibitions with the assistance of a chosen mentor.⁴

Working at the nexus of art and science research, O'Connor provides an opportunity for the exchange of knowledge—the time given by the participants to learn about ecological threats to waterways up and down Aotearoa is, in a way, traded for new making skills. This exchange can be seen as mutually beneficial; and is a chance to foster new ways of confronting the issues facing local and global ecologies.

Jamie Hanton

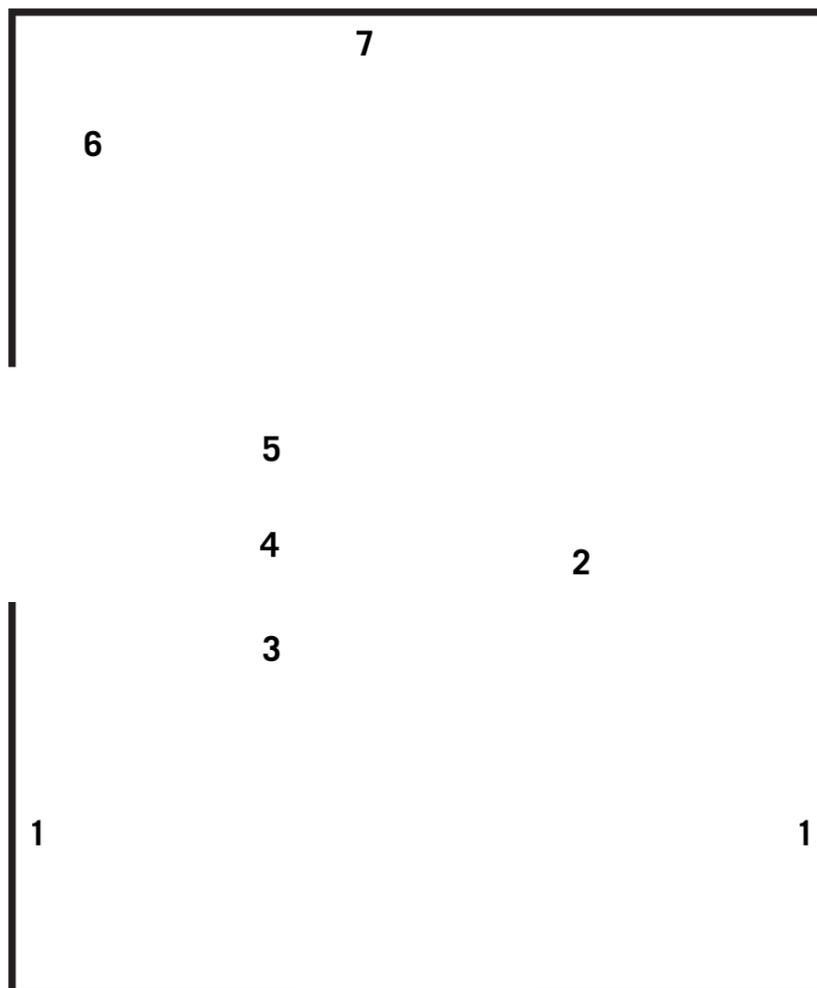
¹ Keti Chukrov, "Towards the Space of the General: on Labour beyond Materiality and Immateriality," *e-flux*, last modified November 2010, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/20/67638/towards-the-space-of-the-general-on-labor-beyond-materiality-and-immateriality/>

² Jim Walker, "A Race to the Bottom: Cruise Lines Seek Reduction of Harbor Pilot's Compensation," *Jim Walker's Cruise Law News*, last modified 18 May 2017, <http://www.cruiselawnews.com/articles/flags-of-convenience-1/>

³ Karen Stade, "New Zealand's first game of rugby", *The Prow*, last modified 2008, <http://www.theprow.org.nz/events/new-zealand-first-game-of-rugby/>

⁴ "handshake 4 – process", *Toi Pōneke*, last modified 1 March 2018, <https://toiponeke.nz/events/2018/9/1/handshake>

List of Works



RECEPTION

1. **Ayesha Green**, *Meeting Grounds*, 2018, acrylic on plywood.
2. **Cushla Donaldson**, *composite for a happiness that forgets nothing*, aluminum composite material, enamel, ink, video (10min 13 sec), Quick Response Codes, the Internet, 2018.
3. **Rob Hood**, *Double Keg Smoker*, two stainless steel beer kegs, stainless steel pipe and steel legs, 2018.
4. **Rob Hood**, *Washing Machine Brazier*, stainless steel washing machine barrel and steel stand, 2016.
5. **Rob Hood**, *Black Light Brazier*, mild steel light fitting and mild steel stand, 2017.
6. **Eve Armstrong**, *Trading Table*, 2003–ongoing. Taking place at The Suter Art Gallery 12-4.30pm, 17-18 March 2018.
7. **Gabby O'Connor**, *The Unseen*, 2016–ongoing, rope and cable ties, dimensions variable.



Image: Still from *composite for a happiness that forgets nothing*, Cushla Donaldson, 2018.

Artist Biographies

Ayesha Green (Ngāti Kahungunu, Kai Tahu) is an artist based in Tāmaki Makaurau. She graduated with a Master of Fine Arts from Elam in 2013 and completed a Graduate Diploma in Museums and Cultural Heritage in 2016. Recent exhibitions include *Alma Venus*, Corbans Estate Art Centre (2018), *Summa Pete*, Papakura Art Gallery (2017), *2. Spirit of the Thing Given (Māori)*, RM Gallery (2017), *Biographies of Transition*, *To Busy to Think*, ARTSPACE (2017).

Cushla Donaldson is an artist based in Tāmaki Makaurau. Her practice seeks to identify, expose, and act upon schisms in the heated environment of late capitalism. Her writing has come to include fiction alongside essays on art, politics and film theory. She graduated from Elam School of Fine Arts before gaining her MFA from Goldsmiths College, University of London, as a recipient of the Anne Reid Scholarship. She has exhibited in New Zealand, Europe and Japan. She has participated in residencies in Estonia and in the Manawatū, New Zealand and has taught Art and Film Theory at Auckland University and Unitech, Auckland.

Eve Armstrong holds a BFA from Elam School of Fine Arts (2003), and in 2006 was an inaugural recipient of the Arts Foundation of New Zealand New Generation Award. In 2017 Armstrong was the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Visiting Artist. She has exhibited widely throughout NZ including major solo exhibitions at Dunedin Public Art Gallery (2017), The Physics Room, Christchurch (2010), City Gallery Wellington (2007) and Artspace, Auckland (2005-6). She has also presented solo projects in international exhibitions including: *The woods that see and hear*, NL (2010), 3rd Auckland Triennial (2007), Busan Biennale (2006) and SCAPE (2006). Her ongoing project *Trading Table* (2003 -) was presented at Spring 1883, Sydney (2017) and at the Auckland Art Fair (2016). Armstrong is represented by Michael Lett, Auckland.

Gabby O'Connor is an artist, interdisciplinary researcher, Antarctic, science communicator, and educator based in Wellington. Her practice operates across multiple disciplines and audiences – between contemporary art, science communication and community action and looks at the different entry point to conversations around our changing climate. O'Connor studied sculpture in Melbourne at the Victorian College of the Arts, has a Masters in Fine arts at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales in Sydney and is currently a PhD candidate at Auckland University supported by the Sustainable Seas NZ National Science Challenge.

Rob Hood lives and works in Christchurch, New Zealand. He graduated with a BFA in Sculpture (1999) and an MFA (2011) from Elam School of Fine Arts, Canterbury University. Exhibitions include: *Precarious Balance*, COCA, NZ, 2016; *Tricksters*, Christchurch Art Gallery, NZ, 2012; *Prospect Contemporary Art Now*, Wellington City Art Gallery, 2011; *From a City Forsaken by its Gods*, First Draft Gallery, Sydney, 2011; *Last Ride in a Hot Air Balloon*, Auckland Triennial, Auckland Art Gallery, 2010. Hood was the Olivia Spencer Bower fellow in 2007. His work is held in the collections of Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tāmaki, Christchurch Art Gallery, Te Puna o Waiwhetū, and the University of Canterbury.

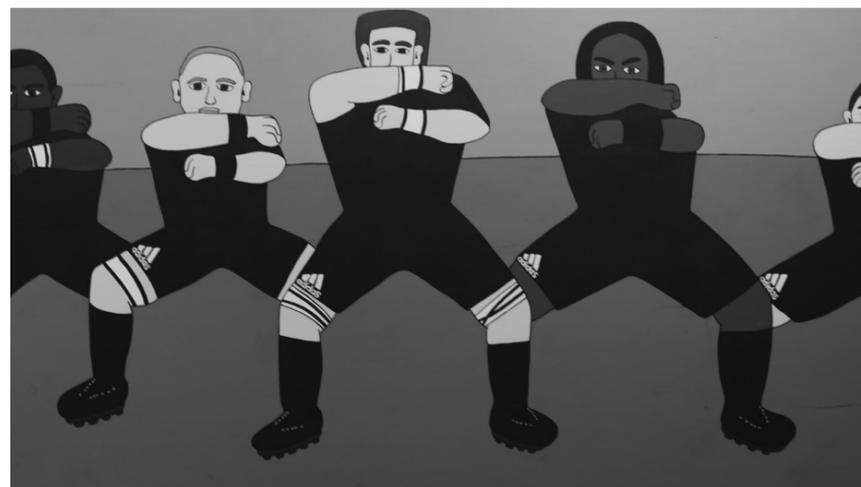


Image: Detail from *Meeting Grounds*, Ayesha Green, 2018.