

# A Wandering Thing

Sophie Bannan and Joshua Harris-Harding

8 August – 15 September 2019

**THE  
PHYSICS  
ROOM** CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

## A Wandering Thing

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Exhibition Preview: Wednesday 7 August, 5.30pm

Exhibition Runs: 8 August – 15 September

Exhibition talk with Joshua Harris-Harding & Jamie Hanton: Thursday 8 August, 12pm

Dinocrates' plan to carve a gigantic likeness of Alexander into the flank of Mount Athos never eventuates. In this plan, Alexander cradles a small city in one hand, and a pitcher in the other, from which a river will flow into the sea.

The main effect of abstracting water from collective guardianship is to conceal the link between the source and its consumption. The disparity between end use and control is exacerbated by the bureaucratisation and scientific professionalisation of water management. Through this arrangement, we are acculturated with the understanding that water is an artefact, distinct from common property.

"I drink from the spring at Cerne Abbas... and get the most vicious cold of my entire life. This particular bug does get me worried... (because) it's very much a working churchyard now, you can see all these graves above. Though one hopes the water comes from below, you do start thinking, well, it's probably flowed through a few bodies too. So probably best not to drink from this well!"

The common law (the law established by precedent), imported here from England, does not recognise ownership rights in freely flowing water. Flowing freshwater is classed as *publici juris*, free for all who can access it – like air and light.

*Some sorcerers do boast  
they have a Rod*

*gathered with vows and sacrifice and (borne about) will strangely nod to hidden Treasure where it lies  
mankind is sure that Rod divine  
for to the Wealthiest (ever) they incline*

.

Jane is born in a Lancashire poorhouse and arrives in Waiuta as a teenager. Someone initially names the town Waiutu – water/river that gives. Consolidated Goldfields Ltd. take 1.5 million tons of gold bearing quartz and ceases operation when a shaft collapses, closing the mine and ghosting the town.

The first of Jane's six babies born at Waiuta hospital dies before his second birthday of a chest infection in late autumn. Their weatherboard cottage is uninsulated; newspaper is stuck with flour glue to the inside walls to keep the draft from coming through cracks and is replaced whenever rats have chewed through it. By morning any water left out is frozen, as well as dew on the inside of windows.

Her second baby, born in 1915, is my great grandmother Edna Greta. The first world war has broken out and with it the international gold standard is suspended and exports are restricted, including that of gold.

Her third baby Florence, born at Waiuta hospital in mid wartime, always has a short bob haircut with a sharp fringe covering her eyebrows, from under which she gazes upon her photographer with a thoughtful scowl.

A photograph: a picket gate with peeling paint is open, cutting into the left edge of the frame; from the gate a slightly raised poured concrete path leads almost horizontally through scraggly grass specked with stones, quartz and greywacke, to a weatherboard house with a covered front porch; people on the porch are facing toward the house but looking over their right shoulders towards the photographer, they're partially obscured by a light flare on the film; a man in a medium toned suit with a neck tie and shiny shoes walks down the path away from the house, left foot forward, he is looking into the camera; ahead of him four girls in two rows, stepping in unison, the modest heels of their right shoes to the concrete, breast buds making small peaks in their short-sleeved white smocks, heads lowered and darkened by the shadow of their narrow brimmed white hats; the girls flank a small dark coffin with metallic hardware, their hands are in white gloves. Florence fell from the maypole in the schoolyard. The maypole stood at the top of a bank running down to the road, so that if you swung high enough and let go you'd land in the middle of Top Road. But by 1928 when Florence falls the schoolhouse has moved, and the maypole with it, so she couldn't have fallen far, but they say that's what causes her brain tumour. She dies at home in late spring after her tenth birthday.

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*A Wandering Thing* presents new work by Sophie Bannan and Josh Harris-Harding. The exhibition brings together two individual bodies of work that are tied together by shared research trajectories. The artists' lines of inquiry and research interests are distinct but converge in a way that broadens the working context of the other.

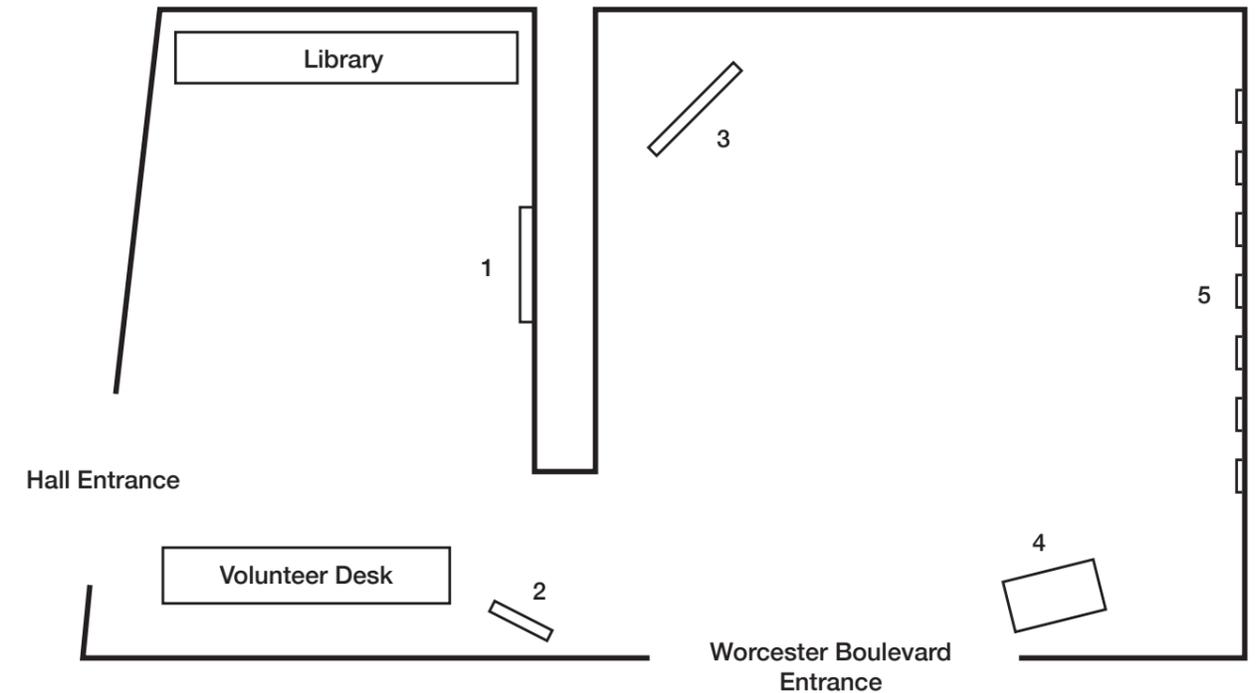
Bannan's contribution to the exhibition includes a photographic series and video (with soundtrack by Motte / Anita Clark) which seeks to reimagine human relationships to landscape through challenging dominant narratives and hierarchies of systems of knowledge. Waiuta (Te Tai Poutini, Aotearoa), is a gold mining ghost town where Bannan's paternal family lived until the mine ceased operation in 1951. By way of multi-modal art making, including image and object making, as well as documentation of archives, Waiuta is used as a testing site with the aim of generating productive conflicts between different systems of knowledge, in order to develop a complex, agential relationship to landscape in the late-capitalist present.

Harris-Harding presents three videos comprising narrative text and images that circle around human relationships to water. Harris' research is concerned with the way selfhood and culture is determined by the contingent fashioning of an outside, or the nature-culture dualism. Water is an "unruly commodity", a core component of the human experience, an agent of control or chaos that crosses the porous boundary between nature and culture. These works operate in the convergence of power structures, language, and dominion over nature.

**Sophie Bannan** (b. 1989, New Zealand) is an artist and writer living in Tāmaki Makaurau. She co-founded and directed artist-run initiatives Personal Best (Auckland), Strines (Melbourne) and North Projects (Christchurch). Recent texts include catalogue essays for *90 Canon Homeshow*, curated by Louise Palmer (2017); and Miranda's Parkes' Frances Hodgkins Fellowship exhibition, *The Merrier* (2017). Recent exhibition projects include *Hut for a Sensuous Goldminer*, with Daegan Wells, Meanwhile Gallery, Wellington (2018); *Stromlo*, with Dan Nash, RM, Auckland (2016); *Backwater*, North Projects, Christchurch (2015); *Thinking About Building*, (group show curated by Melanie Oliver), The Physics Room, Christchurch (2014); and *The Optimists*, with John Ward-Knox, Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Dunedin (2014).

**Joshua Harris-Harding** (b. 1989, New Zealand) is an artist and writer from Tāmaki Makaurau. His research engages with the contingencies of language and the nature-culture dualism through myth, history, and narrative. Recent exhibition projects include *Sports*, Demo Gallery, Auckland (2018), *Inconsolata*, with Vanessa Crofskey, RM Gallery, Auckland (2018), *Lapidary*, Projectspace, Auckland (2017), and contributing text for *The River Remains: ake tonu atu*, with Olyvia Hong, Artspace (2018).

## Floor plan:



- 1 Sophie Bannan, *Waiuta / Waiutu*, 2018-19, digital video and found footage, 7:19 min. Soundtrack by Motte / Anita Clark.
- 2 Joshua Harris-Harding, *Braided*, 2019, single channel video, 3:33 min.
- 3 Joshua Harris-Harding, *Where it goes*, 2019, single channel video, 7:00 min.
- 4 Joshua Harris-Harding, *Gates*, 2019, single channel video, 6:50 min.
- 5 Sophie Bannan, No title (from Waiuta series), 2018-19, 350 x 250mm, C-type prints.