

(Not So) Deep Cuts

P1. Mōrena!

P2. Kia ora e hoa!

P1. It's been a while, how's it going?

P2. Ah, just the usual, hanging out with other members of my aggregation, feasting on my favourite red seaweed Karengo, and trying not to be predated. I need to make my way down to your 'stamping ground', the cool seaweed-abundant waters off Rakiura Stewart Island – a Pāua metropolis. You?

P1. Ha, stamping. I like that. Our muscular feet ain't doing that anytime soon. But sure, glide your way down sometime. Huh, turns out I've been up to pretty much the exact same thing. But I heard you moved recently. Where are you living now?

P2. I'm now off the coast of Pāua-o-Hinekotau, the headland between Kaioruru Church Bay and Te Waipapa Diamond Harbour, on the southern shore of Whakaraupō right across from Lyttelton.

P1. Typically, you move to a place named for yourself!

P2. If it's in the name, it must be a good place to live right? Plus, it's one of the few remaining places that they still harvest Karengo – too much sedimentation in many other parts of the harbour.

P1. As auriforms and audiophiles we've got to be close to centres of musical innovation. A lesser-known common name for our genus (*Haliotis* in case you forgot) is 'sea ears' or 'ear shells', so it makes sense. I glide up to Ōtepoti regularly to see what's new in the 'Dunedin sound'. How's the Lyttelton scene these days?

P2. I'll drift over now and then to catch the tunes floating down from the Wunderbar, and it usually doesn't disappoint. What have you been listening to lately?

P1. The occasional whale song, but also the humming of outboard motors unfortunately – it's dangerous days to be a delicious marine mollusc living near Bluff. What about you?

P2. Some deep cuts from a local blues musician. Yes indeed, I've been feeling the blues (but not blue) lately.

P1. Blues? Hmmm, I was never a fan of Muddy Waters; the sediment irritates my gills. I can't get enough of my ROCK; you'd have to prize me off it!

P2. Don't say that so loudly!

P1. What about musicals? I saw *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* recently. It reminded me of the story of how we got our shells: Tangaroa gifted our ancestor a colourful shell, but the other sea-creatures were jealous of its beauty and broke it. Tangaroa then strengthened the shell and added a layer of camouflage to blend in with the rocks. He charged our ancestor with the life-long project of adding layer upon layer to the shell. So, our shell is our grand masterpiece, and like many artists, it's only in death that our art becomes truly appreciated. Not to get morbid, but what would you want to happen to your shell after you pass?

P2. Technicolour Dreamcoat? I'm not familiar.

P1. Ha! Have you been living under a rock? It's a camp classic!

P2. Bro... I refer to my home as a 'ledge'.

P1. Sorry, sometimes my tastes don't run all that deep, I like the frivolous and kitsch now and then.

P2. Well, none of us are deep, generally not beyond fifteen metres below sea level. Intertidal and subtidal zones are our jam. I guess you could say we're a pretty 'shallow' bunch ha. I'm not a fan of musicals obviously. But anyway, good question. I've thought about the fate of our brethren and the myriad ways their remains have been incorporated into different objects. It seems for us it's a toss-up whether we become a precious heirloom or taonga; or made into a cheap tourist souvenir.

P1. Or even worse, used as an ashtray or inlaid into a toilet seat!

P2. I could possibly deal with being a fridge magnet or a keyring, or even adorning someone's living room with hundreds of other relatives, but I have much less patience for kitsch than you.

P1. Ideally though I'd like to become part of an instrument, inlaid into the fretboard of a guitar, or even better a ukulele.

P2. Ah ha! I've also been listening to a bunch of ukulele tunes. Did you know that what is now the ukulele evolved from the rajão and the machete, instruments that were introduced to Hawaii by Portuguese immigrants in the 1880s? It seems like such an intrinsically Hawaiian thing, but really it evolved out of a cross-pollination of cultures. A major reason why it became so embedded in Hawaii is due to its support and promotion by King Kalākaua, during the Hawaiian renaissance – a resurgence in the Hawaiian cultural identity of Kānaka Maoli (native Hawaiians). Traditionally the preferred tonewood to construct the ukulele is the endemic Hawaiian Koa, but during the post-war years, Maccaferri churned out around nine million cheap plastic 'islander' ukuleles, capitalising on the 'craze' for the instruments and Hawaii in general on the US mainland. I wonder how many dashboard Hula dancers they made during that same period?

P1. Once they establish a market for plastic pāua shells and are able to grow our meat in a lab, we'll be pretty safe I reckon.

P2. I wouldn't count on it. People will always want the real deal – a wooden uke will always sound better than a plastic one. When I'm gone, I'd want my shell to remain intact; maybe it could become the body of a tiny ukulele. But, if you like ukulele tunes, I know someone you ought to check out...

James Hope, Curator - Art, Ashburton Art Gallery and Museum

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EXHIBITION

27 OCTOBER - 01 DECEMBER 2024

JANE VENIS
PĀUA PLAY

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY |

Jane Venis is multi-media artist, writer, and editor. Her arts practice focuses on the politics of contemporary popular culture expressed through the making of objects, video, sound, and performance works. Recent solo exhibitions include *Precious and Pathetic* as part of Suite 23 at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery with Hannah Joynt under their collaborative name *Small Measures*. *Small Measures* took part in the Buinho Creative Hub Residency in Portugal in 2019, their installation *Dual* was shown at Czung Institute of Contemporary Art (CICA) in South Korea in 2020 as part of the Contemporary Art Solo Show Series.

Jane is the co-editor of *The Politics of Design: Privilege and Prejudice in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and South Africa* (2021) and *Art and Design: History, Theory, Practice* (2017). She is

now in her fifth year as editor of the journal *Scope: Art and Design*. Her own art writing links with her studio practice, exploring the fertile ground between art and design. Jane is a Professor at Otago Polytechnic working with postgraduate students at the Dunedin School of Art. She has PHD in Fine Arts from Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Australia, and an MFA (with Distinction), from the Dunedin School of Art.

