

A photograph of a forest path, likely in Waitaha Canterbury Whenua. The path is covered in fallen pine needles and branches. Sunlight filters through the dense canopy of tall trees, creating a bright, hazy glow on the left side of the image. The trees have thick, textured bark and long, dark needles.

LEGACY ISSUES

LENS-BASED
INVESTIGATIONS OF
WAITAHA
CANTERBURY
WHENUA

MITCHELL BRIGHT
CONOR CLARKE
ELLA HICKFORD
MOANA LEE
MIKE O'KANE
TIM J. VELING
HANNAH WATKINSON

Whakareretanga

Emily Lazare (Kāi Tahu, Ngāpuhi)

Kirsty Dunn (Te Aupōuri, Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi)

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I have always lived by awa.

Waihao and Waitaki: the awa my ancestors lived with, traveled down and fished in for short-finned tuna, nearby where our marae now stands. The Waitaki journeys the waters of Ka Tiritiri-o-te-Moana, Ōhau, Pūkaki, Takapō and Ahuriri to Te Moana-nui-a-kiwa.

If you follow the Waihao river you find Wainono lagoon; here, my ancestors once sourced much of their mahinga kai \\ Land Air Water Aotearoa use a Trophic Level Index<sup>1</sup> to gauge water health: they say a measure over 5 is considered ‘very poor’.

The TLI for Wainono is 6.3.

It is hard to imagine the consequences of now eating kai from the same place that once sustained us.

Those waters that carried the wairua and mana of the great lakes and mountains of Te Waipounamu are now drained to feed the same farms that poison them in return. Talk about an absence of utu, but we always knew capitalist industrialisation wasn’t built on an ethic of reciprocity.

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*This is not the first time I have considered the inquisitive nature of water.
The names of these rivers ask questions of us and impart knowledge
simultaneously.*

*So too, does the whenua that holds those awa
(or the memory of them if need be).*

*“That’s what art does, it stimulates memory and makes us remember who we are”,
writes Emma Hislop.*

1. Measuring water clarity, chlorophyll content, total phosphorus and total nitrogen

*"Or maybe that's what water does..."²
History isn't hiding in these waters
(or what's left of them; when does water stop becoming water and start to
become something else?)
You will find no bequest buried in their banks,
no bounty lying underneath the rocks at the bottom of their beds either.
The voices of whanaunga residing there, still, continue to tell their stories.
Waihao.
Wainono.
Waitaki.
Waipounamu.
Waitaha.*

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I grew up on the east-side of Ōtautahi, nearby where Ōtakaro and Ōpawaho meet Tangaroa with a deep embrace and an audience of Canadian geese. They find their way home in spite of the many interventions.

I still live in the catchment of Ōtakaro. This place of play [ō - of, takaro - play] is different now to how it was when I grew up. I've never felt so old as I did warning the kids jumping off the footbridge to be more careful: the waters are shallow and the health of the awa is not what it used to be.

The Ōtakaro has been squished from what was once stretching swamplands – made to conform to western beauty standards, drink the catchment's storm waters from streets painted in car oils, copper and lead, and told not to take up too much space. Like my rivers, the Ōtakaro is valued for what can be extracted from it or washed into it... except by those kids, who would swim in it anyway or try to catch the tuna to take home for their whānau. My hope is for a future where they can do so without cause for my panic, and for the collaboration of human and non-human communities to help that happen.

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*I'm not from here (not Ōtautahi where I work and not Ōhinehou where I live) but
from the far north*

2. Emma Hislop "Te Hau Whakatonu: A Series of Never-Ending Beginnings" *The Pantograph Punch*, 7 February, 2024
<https://www.pantograph-punch.com/posts/te-hau-whakatonu-a-series-of-never-ending-beginnings>

where the Rotokakahi and Awaroa meet at Whangape (or is it Whāngāpē?)
 The place where I grew up, is named Riverhead or
 Rangitōpuni, though I learned the latter through a Google search some 29 years
 after leaving.
 My dad and grandfather would go on overnight fishing trips in the Waitematā on
 an aluminium dinghy;
 I remember the smell of wet Swandris, being fascinated with their black laces at
 the top
 and how they reminded me of the old school leather let-down rugby ball in my
 brother's toy box.
 I can't tell you about the health of the Waitematā Harbour.
 I could look it up; ask for readings/ratings. Kōrero with Whaea Kūkara.
 But I'm inclined to hang out in the early nineties a little longer.
 Linger amongst the mangroves. Listen to the squelch of jandals in
 the bottom of the boat.
 Laugh at my koro teasing my mum with a handful of jellyfish.

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Some indirect things I like about Hinewai reserve:

- the incredibly informative extent to which Hugh Wilson seems to love sign-making
- these signs are bilingual
- the role of unexpected allies (gorse)
- this context of minimal interference restoration affirms space for the agency of nature
- 4.9 stars on Google reviews

The last time I went to Hinewai, we saw a Moko Kākāriki (one of eight endemic green geckos ) sunbathing in our path, like a lady of leisure. This tohu, as I read up on, is traditionally perceived as anything but 'leisurely'; rather, any ancestors who met her on their path would know to turn back. Mere Roberts writes that "...the moko kakariki [were] and still are regarded with dread and fear by Māori for reasons that may have their roots in beliefs concerning crocodiles among the peoples of South-East Asia" .

Are these wisdoms we will inherit from our tūpuna, too? These signs to pay attention; that the path ahead is not the right one.

This path of land clearing, where pockets of earth and forest and water fight for their place in these concrete jungles, is not tika. Ironically, the more humanity need tohu to sort our shit out, the less able they are to cross our paths (due to the shit we can't / won't sort out).

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Some things that keep me up at night:

- Tuna (the thought of them leaving us)
 - Tohu
- (more specifically, ideas about tūpuna guidance and wondering what I might have missed)
 - The day's mistakes I've made in my attempts to speak te reo Māori
 - The sound of truck and trailer units coming in and out of port
 - Longing

One interpretation of the name Hinewai is "water maiden"; however, it was Hineaterepo ("swamp maiden") that hooked up with Māui (yeah that one); and then he got a little dark at her dealings with Tunaroa: the eeliest of all eels, tipuna, tohu, taniwha. Sometimes Tunaroa is the villain. Other times Hineaterepo gets to tell her side of the story. Most times Māui is the hero. The dissected body of Tunaroa endures in eel and plant species which continue to sustain us. What was that about agency and unlikely allies again?

I have been taught from a young age to despise gorse. Though I will admit to having my eyes caught by the gem-like yellow flowers and having marveled at the strength of seeds (this is how I learned the meaning of the word "dormant" - not in regards to majestic and ominous volcanoes but the ability of gorse to come back and back again after the slash and burn). Tell me again about unlikely allies and agency?

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My first year of uni I became a critic, naturally. I was working on a project on my

back lawn one afternoon, on an essay about the place of nature in consumption-centered spaces (i.e., pot plants in shopping malls). Being the intellectual I thought myself to be, I wrote about this placement of nature as an attempt to normalise this juxtaposition of two things so converse: consumerism and the capacity of nature to thrive. My friend joined me on the lawn and asked what I was writing about; she shared a much more holistic perspective than my own – that regardless of the stage and state of humanity, we will always be drawn to nature, we will always crave to be close to her. I now like to think of mall-plants as low-key guerrilla activists, providing commentary on how the latest iPhone is cool and all but have you checked out a forest recently? I promise you hope grows steady in places like these.

I prefer my friend's version of the kaupapa of mall-plants: to look at what might be under the irony – the pull towards honoring whakapapa and the ways this might nurture our respective wairua. I wonder if maybe I approach Conor's work with a similar curiosity.

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Sometimes I think this is what a gallery does to or maybe for me.

It's a push and pull scenario, isn't it?

Come inside to think about the outside.

A public space where private and personal responses collide.

Images of rākau and bodies of water; te taiao framed for us (in all the ways); trash turned treasure, the making and remaking of things; notions of evidence, of change, of challenge.

The fruits of collaboration too, are growing inside here;

what happens when we put this next to this in this way and in this place?

And what of the residual questions prompted by previous works / collaborations / investigations / exhibitions?

I reckon they hang around for a while.

E kōrero ana ngā pakitara...

Where are you from?

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My door frames are made of Rimu timber. These days, constructing homes with native timbers – Rimu, Totara, Matai – boasts a certain luxury, because now there are few of these forests left to cut down. We build our homes in their corpses, those of great forests. In Waitaha, many of the native hardwoods that still stand do

so by coincidence – it was inefficient to grow pine in these places.

I'm interested in the culture of colonial carving; whether 'Jane + John forever' signifies the power we assert with violation? Or whether, like the rest of the ecosystem, we humans are drawn to be close to these trees, leaving our stories with them? Maybe both are true: life is in a toxic relationship with itself. I don't think the rākau cares that John and Jane are dating, but I could be wrong. I imagine future archaeologists hypothesizing the meaning of these ancient ruins: who was skuxdelux69@gmail.com and what did they mean to this tree? At least in my imagined future, these beautiful giants still exist – stretching towards the heavens, reaching for Rangī on Papa's behalf.

My hapū is known for its cave art – for the stories traced across the boundaries of Ōtākou and Waitaha; warnings and gratitudes written in earth pigment. These mark the mahinga kai routes we followed with the seasons.

These places too are subject to colonial carving and there are now fences and barriers surrounding many of them, installed as an act of preservation. These barriers look misplaced in the caves and the valleys, and my mind goes somewhere to notions and the nuance of 'gate-keeping' culture.

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Whakareretanga.

To consider legacy is to contemplate the leaving of something as well as the swiftness with which a legacy is created and expanded; or likewise diminished.

What are we to make of legacies that are dependent on loss; where bequest and forsake go hand in hand? Āe, colonial carving, e hoa. I think about knots and notches. Rings in rākau and the ones John and Jane might have exchanged.

The word "ring-fence" even (nervous laughter).

What's in a name, indeed?

*Take Legacy Issues, for example
Issues as in concerns? Take?! (Reo rua word play gets me every time)*

*Or do you perhaps mean those that come after us?
(Because there are bodies of water in our kupu for those ones too).
Mokopuna.*

*Investigations can entail looking closely at, inspecting, asking questions of.
Re-searching.
Un-earthing.
E kōrero ana ngā pakitara...
Where have you been?*

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The things these places have in common is that they are subject to human mediation, which begs the question, what if they weren't? Or what would a future of collaborative betterment look like?

I hope to suggest that now is the time to see if human intervention, OR our willingness to step back, could lead to something good.

- pick up your rubbish
- love your rivers like you want to bathe in them
- stand somewhere high up and take it all in
- fight your local capitalist
- look out for the tohu and see what they have to say, we can hear them if we try.



## ARTISTS

MITCHELL BRIGHT

CONOR CLARKE

ELLA HICKFORD

MOANA LEE

MIKE O'KANE

TIM J. VELING

HANNAH WATKINSON



# Mitchell Bright

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*Awatea Green Residential Development Bordering CSM1, Looking  
North-East, Halswell*

2017

Inkjet print

This project was born out of a reaction to the place I had grown up in changing rapidly. Selwyn is one of the fastest growing districts in the country in both commercial and residential development. Much of the development was determined after the 2010 and 2011 Christchurch earthquakes. Government and council agencies established the Land Use Recovery Plan in 2013 to free up land for development. With the construction of The Christchurch Southern Motorway stage 2 commencing in 2016, the physicality of the area began to alter significantly. There was a sense of urgency to try and capture what would be lost. I became most drawn to the strange in-between nature of the place as it changed and land use and engagement within the area shifted.

## Conor Clarke

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*Still life*

2022

Pigment ink on Hahnemühle paper

I love a group show, it creates an opportunity to experiment. Here, six new works sit alongside a work made in 2022; a view of a view of Hakatere Conservation Park. Although I've not been there, never seen this place with my own eyes, I have experienced what it's like to sit, surrounded by its photographic representation in the land of illness. These photographs consider instinct and sensibility, as well as that which can or cannot be seen with the human eye or image-making device.

*All works courtesy Jonathan Smart and Two Rooms Gallery*

*Ngā mihi to Paemanu: Ngāi Tahu Contemporary Visual Arts, Ted Howard, Hutton's Shearwater Charitable Trust, the Department of Conservation, Tim J. Veling, University of Canterbury, Bronwyn Perry, and the oncology nurses at Christchurch Hospital*

## Ella Hickford

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*Eroded Loess, Makara Magnet Bay*

2023

High-performance self-adhesive vinyl onto a flat 3mm aluminium panel

These photographs come from a wider body of work that unpicks the social, political, and environmental history of Horomaka Banks Peninsula in Aotearoa New Zealand and its surrounds through historical imagery, text, and diagrams, alongside contemporary photographs. While the work draws extensively on the past for inspiration, it heavily focuses on the effect the history of the area has in the present day; deforestation, erosion, changes to the water table, and the expansion of Ōtautahi Christchurch, from the arrival of European settlers in the mid-nineteenth century to the devastating earthquakes of 2010 – 2011. The work seeks to provide a well-rounded overview of how decisions made in the last 175 years continue to shape the environment around Horomaka Banks Peninsula today.

# Moana Lee

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*Unlikely Ally, Hinewai*

2023

Silver beet emulsion, cotton fibre

These prints are from a larger body of work which marry meaning with materiality encompassing genealogy via ethnobotany to explore what it means to be tangata Tiriti.

I have an affinity with gorse, originating from my ancestors' birthplaces in Ireland, Scotland and Wales, it is also a key ingredient in my DIY well-being tincture, reflecting human trajectories, it is a link to my lineage. I captured the shadow of gorse as an anthotype, a mid-19th century technique, which consists of plant juices and vodka.

The non-lightfast anthotype reflects this unlikely plant ally's catalytic role in forest regeneration at the once gorse-infested gully that is Hinewai Reserve in Horomaka (Banks Peninsula). I photographed landscapes here with black and white film processed in coffee, vitamin c, washing soda, salt, and water gathered from the site.

This is where thirty-seven years ago botanist, Hugh Wilson, instigated regeneration by consciously stepping back allowing Nature to reassert her original covering. Gorse is shade intolerant and nitrogen fixing and Wilson knew it made the perfect nursery plant. The dormant endemic seeds germinated into saplings beneath the gorse, eventually outgrowing the nursery, overshadowing and transforming the gorse into mulch as they grew into strong trees.

## Mike O'Kane

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*Adjacent airport, Grays  
Road, Christchurch  
2002*  
Photographic print

These photographs form a part of the Roadside Cassette Tapes, a collaborative project which I instigated and coordinated in 2002. This project stemmed from curiosity – from hours of driving through landscapes and being distracted by flickering bits of discarded old cassette tape moving in the breeze.

I speculated on the tapes' contents and whether they would still play. I picked up some tape just out of Balclutha, and once delicately disentangled, spliced and wound into a cassette body, both sides played. It was alive again, at least for 20 seconds. Later I returned and photographed the site. This documented the location of sample one, to become one of 19 tracks on the eventual CD that collected all the recovered tape samples together.

I had friends around the country who were keen to collaborate, so assembled kits for each of them, including a disposable camera, pen and bags, and posted them off. They ventured to pick up bits of old tape, and posted them to me along with the used cameras, and humorous and hair-raising anecdotes of tape recovery. The four photos shown here were taken by my collaborators in Christchurch. A special thanks to them, for parking in precarious positions to get the ribbons of tangled tape from traffic islands and other hazardous places.

## Tim J. Veling

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*Pūharakekenui Styx River (Dry Swale),  
Harewood,  
2022  
Red, Green and Blue (tri-colour) separation  
negatives, archival pigment print*

In 2022 I explored Pūharakekenui Styx River for places of quiet contemplation and elusive beauty. Inspired by the Styx Living Laboratory Trust vision to establish a 'Source to Sea' walkway to promote the environment, it's rich ecosystems, cultural significance and narratives, I made topographical photo-maps at key and lesser-known sites along the river's edge in an attempt to capture fleeting plays of light and atmosphere that makes this body of water special.

Pūharakekenui originates in Harewood as a dry swale. Via Ōtautahi's northern suburbs, it meanders east through Styx Mill Reserve and is fed at Redwood Springs. It passes under the Northern Corridor then through commercial, residential and lifestyle developments and conservation reserves. The river mouth feeds into Brooklands Lagoon alongside the Waimakariri River.

Using a large format camera and monochrome film, I made multi-shot topographical studies alongside tri-colour recordings, subverting a technique famously used in *The Wizard of Oz*. While the black and white studies map an immersive sense of space, the tri-colour images reveal something felt but not often comprehended when standing in situ; light of transcendent, redeeming potential – even in places of environmental neglect.

Work presented in this exhibition constitutes a small portion of this project, made alongside the Pūharakekenui Styx Living Laboratory Trust.

# Hannah Watkinson

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*Outlet*

2024

C-Type Fujiflex Chromira photographic print

I overlay decades of historic aerial imagery with medium-format photographs of renaissance-influenced composition of the present-day state of infrastructure and sites affected by consumerist uses of natural resources. Through this, I go searching for ways to document, consider, understand, and question the ways we use te taiao (the natural world) to benefit our twenty-first-century lifestyles and our national obsessions with ‘progress’ and ‘growth’.

In the past, I’ve focused on extraction industries, material export, and coastal erosion. In this particular line of inquiry, I’m interested in the way we constrain, control, or channel water in order to harness its power – whether to produce energy in a hydroelectric scheme or to ensure that its force is not ‘misdirected’ toward productive/occupied land when it follows its natural boom and bust state (supercharged by climate change) of flooding and drying up. I’m interested in the (unscientific) concept of water having a memory, of remembering its historic braid plains, the paths of least resistance being those that it returns to and finds again.

# Artist Biographies

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## **Mitchell Bright**

Mitchell Bright is a photographer living in Waitaha Canterbury. He was born in 1994 and gained a Masters in Photography at the Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury, in 2018. Growing up he spent his time in Selwyn and the West Coast of the South Island. He addresses these areas in his work, frequently exploring them and documenting his findings, with a particular interest in how individuals and society view and interact with the landscape.

## **Conor Clarke**

Conor Clarke (Waitaha, Ngāti Māmoe, Ngāi Tahu) grew up in rural Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. She is an artist, photographer, Masters candidate, and educator at Ilam School of Fine Arts. Recently her interests have included mountains in many forms, the endangered Kaikōura Tītī, vision and blindness, the mechanism of the lens, and the politics of photography. Recent exhibitions include Vital Machinery at Hastings Art Gallery, Peaks and Troughs at Jonathan Smart Gallery, and Herbarium at Te Ara Ātea. She is represented by Two Rooms and Jonathan Smart Gallery.

## **Ella Hickford**

Ella Hickford's photographic interests largely lie in ideas around time and place. Raised on the West Coast, her passion for the environment is often reflected in her work with past projects focusing on the ecology of Christchurch and her relationship to places of familial significance. Ella graduated from the Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury, in 2023 with a Master's in Fine Arts and is dedicated to making work around the nearby Waimakariri River and the greater Christchurch area.

## **Moana Lee**

Moana Lee works with plant-based photographic processes in a combination of documentary and fine art genres and has exhibited regularly whilst studying at the Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury. Moana's recent Master of Fine Arts degree encompassed genealogy and ethnobotany tracing human trajectories as a way of exploring what it means to be tangata Tiriti in the current political climate.

## **Mike O'Kane**

Mike O'Kane resides in Ōtepoti Dunedin and holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Otago Polytechnic School of Art, where he lectured part-time for several years. Mike has had several solo and group exhibitions and was a founding member of the Otago Sculpture Trust. Curiosity and play feature in much of his work – the action of playing can lead to what he creates, and sometimes works derive from looking back nostalgically and critically at playthings of his youth.

## **Tim J. Veling**

Tim's practice primarily focuses on issues and people close to home and heart. His work straddles the genres of fine art and documentary photography. He has exhibited nationally and internationally. Tim lectures in photography at the University of Canterbury Ilam School of Fine Arts. He is the director and administrator of Place in Time: The Christchurch Documentary Project.

## **Hannah Watkinson**

Hannah Watkinson is based in Ōtautahi Christchurch. Her photographic practice considers fine art and documentary genres, attempting to communicate the psychological landscape and social-political environment through images. After completing her Master's degree in 2021 at Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury, Watkinson published a book titled *The Near Future*, a study of the Buller region drawing on a decade of research and photographic archive.







IN  
SITU  
PHOTO  
PROJECT

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ASHBURTON  
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