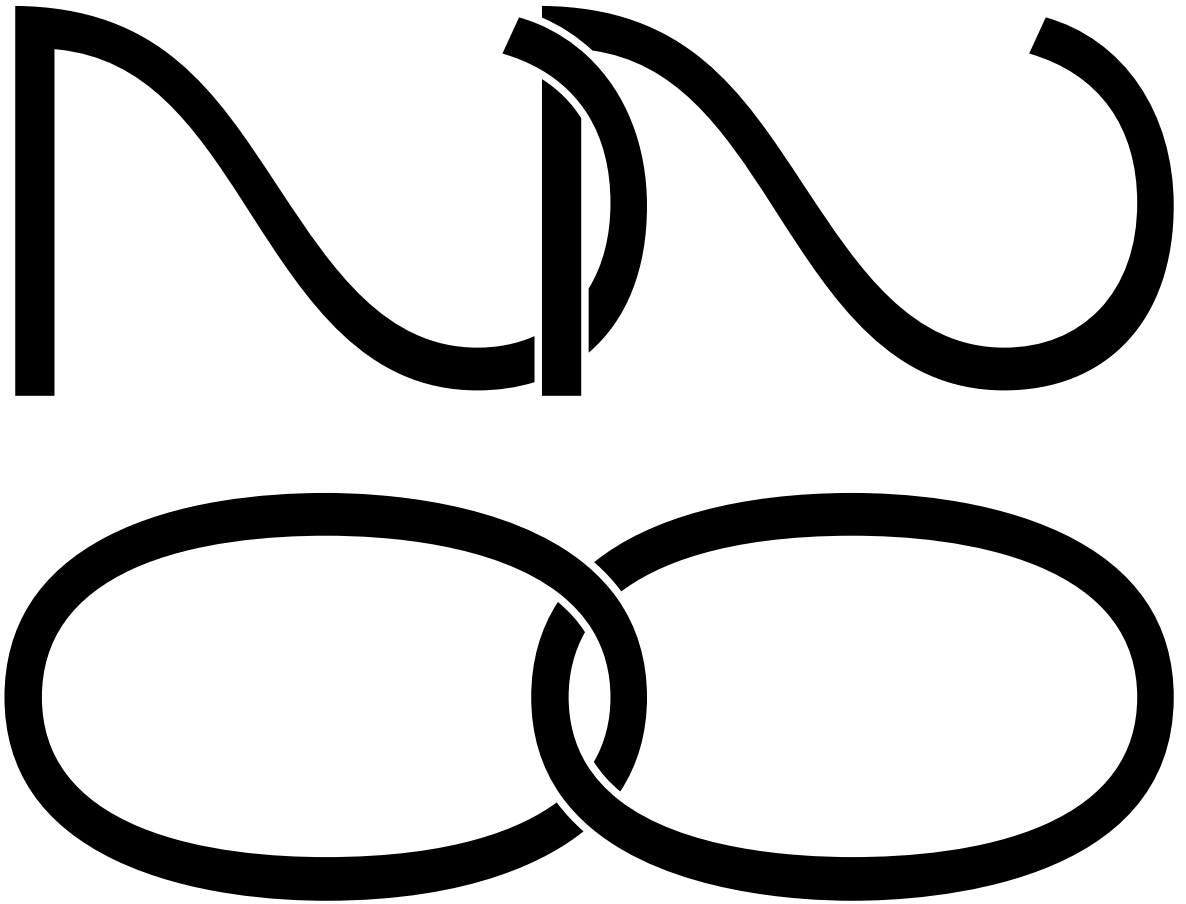

words of wisdom

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Contents

So what am I?
By Reuben Friend

Wayne Youle is a tutū-fingers! Well, at least that is what this text-based artwork from 2012 would have us believe **(1)**. ‘Tutū-fingers’ is a common Māori expression for people who are compelled to meddle (tutū). The most infamous ‘tutū’ of all was the audacious demi-god Māui. Māui’s investigations into the nature of life and existence led to the acquisition of great knowledge, but his trickster methods and constant pushing of boundaries caused great annoyance to those he encountered along the way – like the time Māui had the brilliant idea to catch the sun as it woke from its morning slumber, and punch it in the face repeatedly until it agreed to traverse the sky at a more people-pleasant pace.

Like Māui, Wayne Youle is compelled to meddle, repeatedly testing cultural boundaries. Some of his ideas are a little hard-hitting for certain audiences, and at times in the past it may have been wise for him to heed words of wisdom from his elders before metaphorically putting his head on the line with risqué ideas and statements – like the time he decided to create a Gordon Walters inspired swastika to test ideas of cultural ownership over images.

Another translation for ‘tutū’ is the idea of standing up, standing out, or being stirred up with emotion and vigour. This too would be an apt descriptor for Wayne Youle, an artist who has energetically worked his way through a vast array of pop-culture and art historical references in his artwork, appropriating ideas from other artists to create impactful statements of his own.

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Wordplay, humour and provocation have proven to be successful artistic strategies over the past two decades, providing significant profile for Youle's ideas and artworks in the media. The origins of this methodology were developed during Youle's adolescent years, a time when his cultural identity was coming under increased scrutiny, forcing him to develop strategies of survival to negotiate difficult situations.

THE EARLY YEARS

Reflecting on his childhood as a white-passing boy of Māori and Pākehā heritage growing up in Tītahi Bay in the 1970s and 1980s, Youle recalls feeling distanced from Māori kids in the neighbourhood because of his fair skin colour. Equally, efforts to assert his Māori identity through kapa haka and other cultural activities created a sense of otherness from his Pākehā school mates. Allegiances were tested, with questions such as "But you're mostly White though, aren't you? Why would you want to be one of them?"[1] Humour provided a way to sidestep awkward discussions, but it left Youle with a very real-world awareness of the cultural divisions that exist in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Inspiration came in various forms, including the cult classic 1984 movie *Karate Kid*. Youle identified with the main character's boyish cheek, his struggle to fit in, and his drive to excel in the face of adversity. Echoes of this filmic influence are still resoundingly evident in his practice today. In a 2017 artwork titled *I'll be the one wearing the pink carnation, standing in the corner (sweating)* **(2)**, Youle presents a pair of white Converse sneakers

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poking out from beneath a shower-curtain. With this obscure reference to the Halloween costume worn by the lead character in the *Karate Kid* movie, Youle expresses his childhood desire to hide and obscure his identity, to be present but sheltered from assumptions derived from his physical appearance.

After graduating from Mana College, Youle enrolled at the Wellington Polytechnic School of Design, graduating with a major in typography in 1999. Art provided a means to articulate the dynamics of interculturality that Youle was forced to negotiate on a daily basis, to understand and respect two distinct worldviews while also trying to locate his personal position within this cultural dichotomy. Consequently, Youle's perspectives on art did not always align with dominant Pākehā New Zealand art historical narratives, nor did they necessarily align with the status quo of Māori art traditions perpetuated by customary practitioners. His early works often expressed this frustration with essentialist views of Māori and Pākehā art, culture, identity and politics.

Obsessed with revisionist narratives, Youle appropriated pop-culture tropes and the visual language of other artists in an attempt to re-write or correct problematic issues that he saw within the narratives of Aotearoa New Zealand art history.

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Rated 201 **(3)**, Youle's first solo exhibition, held at City Gallery Wellington in 2001, was an early attempt to address this dichotomy. The exhibition consisted of 201 35-mm slide images, featuring Victorian-era photographs and portraits of Māori

posed in a state of undress, interspersed with a selection of provocative and pornographic contemporary images, selected to test perceptions of 'taste' and 'culture'.

Hunting Natives at the Foot of the Mountain **(4)**, another photographic work made in the same year, drew inspiration from drawings and paintings created by early colonial artists and military men Charles Heaphy and Major Horatio Gordon Robley. Heaphy was a British soldier and artist who came to Aotearoa New Zealand to work as a land surveyor. His 1840 painting of *Mt Egmont from the southward* forms the backdrop to Youle's photograph, depicting the lands of the pacifist Māori settlement of Parihaka that were illegally surveyed and confiscated by the colonial government in 1881. Robley, an artist and military man renowned for his trade in human remains, is represented in the photograph as an armed and shirtless plastic action figure, seemingly stalking a similarly plastic Māori doll. The work questions the cultural lens that celebrates these military men as cultural pioneers.

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Youle's criticisms of these historical narratives were not limited to Pākehā histories. For his first commercial solo exhibition, *Pretty Boy*, held at Bartley + Company Gallery in Wellington in 2004, Youle produced *Skully Pops* and *Often Liked, Occasionally Beaten* **(5)**, a collection of colourful resin skulls and hei tiki lollipops. The works referenced the popular Frosty Boy ice cream jingle "Often licked, never beaten", making unsettling links between the practice of cannibalism and the trade in human remains carried out by certain iwi in the 19th century.

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Critics such as Peter Ireland questioned Youle's offensive stance, asking whether his frustrations with the historical representation of Māori justified the offense he was causing through the presentation of further problematic contemporary images.[2]

As with his experiences at high school, Youle's bicultural stance initially posed a quandary around cultural allegiances. Remembering those early years of his career, Youle states, *"When I was included in art shows that were Māori focused or themed, questions were raised because of my skin colour … Then in other shows where ethnicity wasn't a prerequisite, I felt unsure about the type of work that I was expected to make, like I had to pick a side."*[3]

This statement encapsulates Youle's struggle to culturally locate his art practice. At the same time, this site of back and forward dialogue was where Youle felt the most agency as an artist, finding ways to reconcile the historical and contemporary implications of biculturalism. With this mode of practice came a sense of cultural licence, where no issue was off limits. As he states, *"Nothing is sacred for me. I draw on a broad range of symbolic references, from early memories of school friends; to popular culture celebrities like Big Big; political figures like Trump; or historical figures such as the powerful Māori chief Te Rauparaha."*[4] **(6)**

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It was a risky path to take, with several prominent Pākehā critics labelling his practice 'parasitic', and labelling Youle as an artist who leaches off other artists (many of whom held vampiric

practices themselves).[5]

Conversely, Māori curators Jonathan Mane-Wheoki and Ngahiraka Mason embraced Youle as part of the Kāhui Whetū (Gathering of Stars) and Te Ringa Hou (The New Hands) generation of Māori conceptual artists, which included leading contemporary artists such as Reuben Paterson, Darryn George, Eugene Hansen, Nathan Pohio, Rachel Rakena, Hemi Macgregor, Saffron Te Ratana and Star Gossage.[6] Despite this, Youle still felt a sense of antagonism from certain Māori artists who continued to question his cultural authenticity and authority to speak on Māori subjects.[7]

In 2006 Youle was selected to participate in *Pasifika Styles* **(7)**, an ambitious curatorial project led by anthropologist Amiria Salmond and artist Rosanna Raymond at the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in England. Framed as a groundbreaking experiment in the display of contemporary Pacific art, the project invited leading contemporary Māori and Pacific artists to work with objects from the collection, creating artworks and installations that reconnected museum objects with the communities they came from.

Youle's installation, exhibited within the glass museum display cases within the section of the museum relating to 'Magic and Religion', presented replica wooden boxes used to store and catalogue toi moko and other human remains in the museum. Presenting human remains as commodities, the installation considered the cultural specificity of offence, whereby Māori and Pākehā were both implicated in the trade in human remains.

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Art galleries and museums are complicit in the promotion of art historical narratives, but they are also important sites for contemporary activism. In a 2011 review, Ann Poulsen noted that *"Wayne Youle is a contemporary Māori artist who has gained recognition for his critique of cultural practices, some of which, like racism, are offensive. And that the museum itself, a treasury of items displayed to tell a particular cultural narrative, is more than just a context for this artist's work; it is also a construction he investigates."*[8]

Youle's mining of art history, museum collections and pop culture references was a form of cultural reconnaissance, invading the institutions and visual language of the coloniser to reframe Māori and Pākehā cultural narratives from a bicultural perspective. This mode of practice culminated in Youle's first mid-career survey exhibition, *10 Down*, held at Pātaka in 2009.

10 DOWN

10 Down **(8)** revealed just how intensely Youle had been working through issues that had weighed on him personally and professionally over the first ten years of his art career. With a huge number of artworks installed from floor to ceiling, each artwork formed part of a larger installation matrix, mapping out an expansive whakapapa of issues and art historical references at play in his practice.

Works such as *Simple Mathematics* (2005–06) raided ideas from Peter Robinson's percentage paintings, Michael Parekowhai's use of the Te Ataarangi Cuisenaire rods, and Gordon Walters' stem and bulb paintings in an attempt to unpack

the formula for making ‘successful’ Māori art – implicitly, the type of Māori art that most emphatically spoke to Pākehā curators.

Despite the abundant references and cultural narratives playing out in Youle’s work, one of the criticisms of the show was that the works often felt like one-line jibes, punchlines with limited conceptual depth. As critic Mark Amery wrote at the time, *“Youle pushes the magpie creed of the designer to new lengths. He’s been taking other artists’ ideas and twisting them to new hybrid conclusions for a while now but as often as I go to write some of these tactics off as cheap, empty gestures with only limited conceptual pop, I also can’t help admiring him for having the eye to always find them and keep on pushing.”*[9] This, however, was entirely the point. For Youle, art-making as a methodology for research and personal development required incessant investigation and creative output. Quick-witted, quickly produced content enabled Youle to constantly release new artistic propositions into the public realm, responding in real time to issues at hand. Youle’s early works, formally simple with pointed quips for titles, acted like Internet memes, poking fun at cultural politics affecting the perception and value of art and culture in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In the age of social media, it is interesting to consider Youle’s early work in this way, measuring the currency of his practice not by the conceptual depth of each individual piece, but as a series of memes, with the critical weight of his practice amassed through constant content generation. If Youle’s incessant criticisms of the Aotearoa

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New Zealand art canon had been made today, his practice would have landed soundly within the conventions of call-out culture.

Current social conventions would at best label Youle a social influencer, or at worst someone celebrated for trolling the establishment. Arguably, some of his works may have gone too far. Shock value as a tactic generated considerable profile early in his career, but there was often a price to pay. As an established artist, Youle is more cautious with the statements he makes. Works such as *When I grow up I want to be Black* **(9)**, a 2006 photograph of the artist in blackface, for instance, would land very differently today. Reflecting on this, Youle states, *“The work was done 13 years ago, a time where I never quite felt white … or black enough. From the day my boys were born they have been taught that they come from many places and many peoples.”*

The birth of Youle’s children heralded a new perspective on cultural inheritance, and a broader awareness of the impact of his art. This realisation marked an important transition in Youle’s practice, and he expanded his subject matter to embrace cultural multiplicity as a source of enrichment for his family, and empowerment for his practice.

Early signs of this new vein of interest emerge in *10 Down*, with works such as *Fatherly Advice* (2008–09), a note to his children about the beauty of their mother and grandmother, and *My Girlfriend’s Mum* (2008), a sailor tattoo style portrait of his partner’s mother. This emergent interest in ideas of home, family and multiplicity was also evident in other projects completed that year, including an episode

made for TVNZ 7's series *New Artland*, where Youle convinced 100 people to be tattooed in a single day with a black stencil of Aotearoa New Zealand. Red dots were tattooed on top of the stencil to indicate the geographical location of the subject's tūrangawaewae, the places they call home.

FINGERS CROSSED

Fingers Crossed **(10)**, Youle's second solo exhibition at City Gallery Wellington, held in 2012, was ostensibly an exploration of biculturalism, comparing Māori and Pākehā perspectives of home and belonging. But as with many of Youle's titles, the double entendre of crossing one's fingers held ulterior significance for the artist.

Fingers Crossed was the first exhibition to encompass both the Deane Gallery (then dedicated to Māori and Pacific art) and the Hirschfeld Gallery (then dedicated to Wellington artists) at City Gallery Wellington. Youle had been approached to create an exhibition that embraced the mandate of both spaces. In response, Youle cut a hole in the wall between the two spaces and inserted a glass window for people to see across both spaces. Looking through into the Deane Gallery, visitors saw the painting *.454 kg of whatever and who really cares* (2012) **(11)**, consisting of one pound of paint that had been colour-matched to the darkest part of Youle's skin. Looking into the Hirschfeld Gallery, *I Can See Your Culture from Here* **(12)** could be seen, a painting of ten different shades of white paint.

While these works played to Youle's established penchant for cultural and artistic trickery, others looked beyond Youle's personal identity politics

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to consider the perspective of the next generation. Notably, many of the works in *Fingers Crossed* were made subsequent to the devastating 2011 Christchurch earthquakes. Youle and his family had relocated from Porirua to Canterbury in 2003, and the title of the exhibition, as well as many of the works within it, referenced the feelings of caution and optimism that had swept over their South Island community in the wake of this tragic event. Works such as *Safety found in the unknown* **(13)** expressed a concern for the fragility of life, and a tentative sense of hope for the future of his family and children.

With the safety of his family at the front of mind, it is not surprising that concerns for his children feature prominently in the exhibition. *I know you are you said you are* was inspired by the playful tutū-fingered inquisitiveness of Youle's sons, eliciting memories from his own childhood. *The Naughty Chair* **(14)**, consisting of two wooden chairs that had been pieced together with the arm rests conjoined, detained the sitter without a means of escape once seated; a memory perhaps of after-school detentions, or at least the feeling of being detained during long periods of desk work during school hours.

In the sculptural installation *Genius* **(15)**, Youle interlocked a series of wooden walking canes from floor to ceiling as a tribute to his eldest son Kupa. Diagnosed on the autism spectrum at an early age, as a baby Kupa possessed accelerated motor skills, excelling at activities that required precise hand-eye coordination, like the Barrel of Monkeys game. Youle created *Genius* for Kupa, creating a touching

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reminder of the early and final stages of learning to walk.

With the earthquakes having forever changed the physical landscape of Christchurch city and the wider Canterbury region, Youle began to look at the landscape as a site for artistic engagement and rejuvenation. Major public artworks such as *I seem to have temporarily misplaced my sense of humour* (2011) **(16)** and *The Gift That Keeps Giving* (2017) **(17)** activated Youle's wit and humour, but with drastically different intent than works made earlier in his career. Rather than seeking to break down the walls of the establishment, Youle's humour was repurposed for constructive means, building community spirit through messages of resilience.

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Responding to government calls for a quick recovery following the quakes, Youle created *The Saviour* (2012) **(18)**, a repurposed children's funfair horse painted stark white, toying with the idea of a white saviour riding in to save the day. The mechanical noise and movement of the horse conjures the nostalgic excitement of a carnival fairground or cavalcade as the horse rocks robotically back and forth, but ultimately goes nowhere and achieves little more than treading the same ground.

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The Saviour was featured in Youle's solo exhibition *Look Mum, No Hands* held at Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū in 2017. It was initially intended as a follow up to *10 Down*, but the earthquakes put a significant damper on plans, delaying the exhibition for several years and shifting the focus of the exhibition. When the exhibition finally opened, perspectives on time and family had become the main themes, with Youle's parents and children providing the raw data for these observations.

One of those observations that Youle continually returns to since the 2011 earthquakes is the relativity of time, not in a scientific sense, but in terms of how it is perceived at different stages of our lives. Time is often said to fly by for adults, but for children an hour can seem like an eternity. Youle presents contemplations on these perspectives of time in artworks such as *Piece of String* (2014–15) **(19)**, a 28-metre-long scarf knitted by Youle's mother Jacqui over the course of one year, contemplating the amount of work that one person can produce in a lifetime, and the uncertainty of just how long that life might be.

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Youle's father Andy appears in *March of the Good Bastard* (2015) **(20)**, a video documenting the time it takes Andy to walk up Youle's kilometre-long gravel driveway. As curator Felicity Milburn notes in her essay for the exhibition, *"It's a surprisingly moving scene; a reminder of how an apparently standard distance is relative to the strength of our body, but also of how personal relationships are measured out in ordinary moments, rather than grand occasions. Because, of course, the solitary man on our screen is not really alone; his son walks beside him as a witness and participant."*[10]

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My fact is no match for your fiction (2014–15) **(21)** presents a Māori contemplation on time, as understood by Youle's 11-year-old son Kupa. As Youle tells the story, *"I made a series of postcards*

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for the reopening of the Christchurch Art Gallery. I did two cards, one for each of my sons that I had at that time. This one was designed for Kupa, my oldest son, who is 11 now. One day I was reading him the story of Māui slowing the sun, and Kupa took the details of the story to heart. Sometime later, at bedtime, he asks why he can't stay up late. I told him it was night time. In reply he says, 'If the sun was still up, I wouldn't have to sleep.' To which he adds, 'I will slow the sun down, like Māui.' Easy as that, he retells the story of Māui word for word."[11]

20/20: WORDS OF WISDOM

Many of the works from *Look Mum, No Hands* flowed through into Youle's second survey exhibition, *20/20: words of wisdom*, presented at Pātaka over the summer of 2019–20. Family again plays a major role in the show, this time through a specific tribute to Youle's father. In the exhibition Youle placed two watches at the entrance of the gallery, one given to his father after 20 years of service working at the iconic James Smith department store in Wellington, and another purchased for himself in recognition of his own 20-year milestone working as a full-time artist. His father's watch is the traditional commemorative gold timepiece; Youle's watch has Mickey Mouse pictured on the dial and the words REAL JOB etched on the back. As Youle explains, the etching *"refers to the words my father would say when he spoke of my 'Mickey Mouse' job. I always told him it was a real job. His humour comes from a place of love … I am sure of it."*[12] Entitled *Blood, sweat and tears and the acknowledgment of persistence* (1992–2019) **(22)**, the watches are a literal embodiment of the passage of time, and for Youle a reference to the idea of 'skin in the game' accumulated through

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time invested into one's life work.

At the centre of the exhibition sits *Alone Time* (2014), a 3.2 m × 3.6 m plywood recreation of Youle's art studio. This is where Youle spends his time, proudly boasting whenever he is in the gallery that he is an artist who always shows up to work. The interior is obsessively organised and tidy, filled also with a series of sight gags: an abstract sculpture created from a book on abstract sculpture, a series of cat posters digitally manipulated into patterned 1960s-style wallpaper. At the entrance hangs a banner that suspends viewers in anticipation, stating that the artist will be 'Back in 5 Minutes'.

Of all the works in the exhibition, *I see you, sunny disposition, optimism and hope* (2018) presents an interesting new direction in Youle's recent work – exploring the experiences of Māori communities beyond his immediate family and the insular realms of the art world. A smaller iteration of a 2018 exhibition at CoCA Christchurch titled *Ajar*, the work explores the idea of time as experienced by Māori in the prison system. At the centre of the installation is a blue stained-glass window, a symbol for greener grass and bluer skies on the other side. A hand-carved kōruru looks through the glass, surrounded by an assortment of materials and art supplies commonly found in rehabilitation centres. Light bulbs of various colours turn on and off as the public interacts with the work, triggered by sensors hidden underneath the table. About the installation, Youle states, *"They say idle hands are the devil's workshop. So it's easy to see why art and craft have often been used as therapeutic tools*

in rehabilitation. Making creates purpose, and purpose creates hope. I made this work for those with idle hands. The ability to see the brighter side, even if it seems far away."

Having cast out the demons of his youth in his first decade, and having learned what is most important in his second, Youle's artistic interests look to be broadening again heading into his third decade of art making. Like Māui, Youle remains willing to venture where others may not wish to tread, but he does so with the retrospective wisdom and respect that comes with age and experience.

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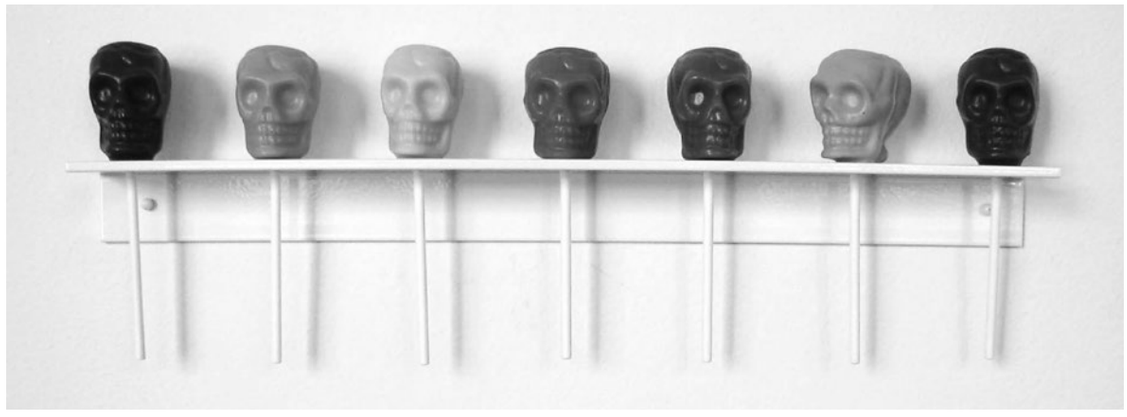

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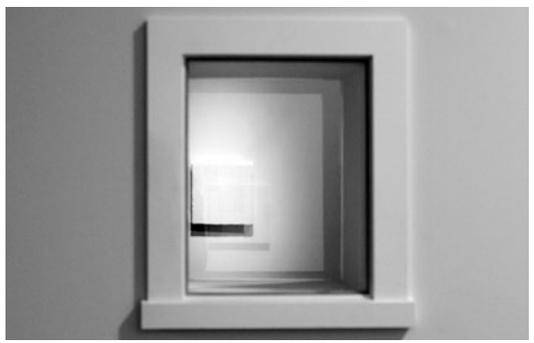

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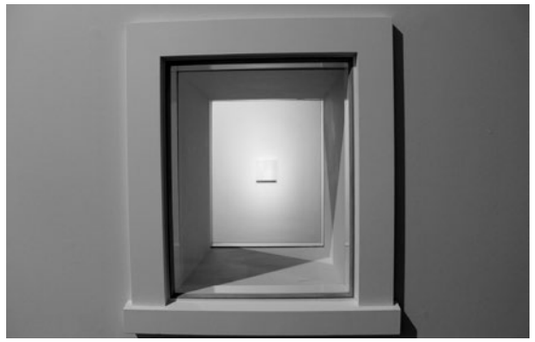

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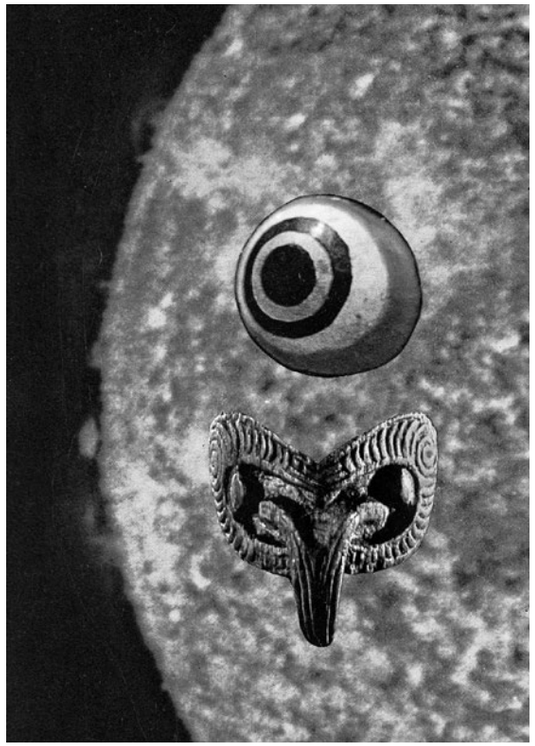

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Public Intimacy / Wayne Youle talks to Lara Strongman

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Lara Strongman: We've been friends for a long time. We got to know each other first with your *Rated* **(23)** show in 2001 at City Gallery Wellington. Your first exhibition in a public gallery. *Rated* was a tough project, both emotionally and conceptually. What was the premise behind it?

Wayne Youle: At the time, there seemed to have been an influx of people who were offended about things. There were all those legal issues going on in the background, because the Keith Haring exhibition had been controversial. I was interested in how we're offended by imagery. As viewers, we have quite a visceral response. I was interested in how simple images, no text, can become offensive to people, and how what you're offended by depends on the background of the individual. I was teaching photography at the time and I made each work as a 35-mm negative sized image, because I didn't need to slap you in the face. That wouldn't have worked. I needed the images to be tiny, and people to approach them and go 'Whoa, hold on.'

LS: You needed intimacy.

WY: When people visited the show in pairs or groups, they ended up by themselves, you couldn't stand side by side looking and interacting with another person. I'd been collecting offensive imagery for a while. For me, what was offensive was that old European dusky maiden exploitative imagery that ended up on postcards. There's a couple of famous images of tangata whenua: the photograph of a woman with a pipe and hat, and her breast exposed. To this day, it has no ethical place for me. Then I went and bought an R18

X-rated mag, exposed flesh – and other people were offended by it, but it washed right over me.

I wanted 201 images, hung in a frieze around the space. The censor looked at the images before the show opened. He said look, if we take out these ones that might be deemed R18, we can make the show open to the public. If we keep them in, we have to restrict it. And I said *of course we have to keep them in!* 189 images wouldn't have had the same ring. We kept them in, and the Gallery ended up getting students with a diary to sit in the space and record people's reactions. There was a wide range, some quite extreme. Those are the reactions you want. I had a Tongan student who'd been a tank mechanic in Bougainville. He was offended because I had a painting of Jesus on the cross, and right next to it was a heart-breaking image of a monkey strapped to a table and being tested for allergies to shampoo. They had the same pose. I found strange images. The one that got lots of people going was that portrait of Nan Goldin with two black eyes. Oh my God. Spousal abuse. That was quite a universal thing: we all look sideways at a woman with black eyes.

LS: I don't remember being offended by anything in the *Rated* show, but some images I found deeply traumatic. They were the ones in which people were being treated badly. The open-ended nature of that early work – your desire for people to engage with it on their own terms – is something I think that's never left your practice.

WY: *Rated* was a humbling entrance into the art world for me. Out there in public, quite early on.

LS: You grew up in Tītahi Bay. What were the first public works you saw?

WY: On the Māori side of my family, my Mum's mum, I always knew my grandmother as Nana Norma. Her name was actually Moengaroa, but people couldn't say it. She was the one who promoted art to me. The first exhibition I ever saw was Duane Hansen, with my nana, in Wellington. It put me on a track.

My parents never drove, they never had a car. So trips to the Far North, to Kaikohe where we were from, were massive journeys. Adventures. My nana drove us up in her green Morris Minor, super fast. She was a real firecracker. The Māori side of my family were very much the driver for art, over my European grandparents, who would have preferred me to get a real job. As a boy I saw the art of te ao Māori, beautiful things like kōwhaiwhai, and Te Hau ki Tūranga, the house at Te Papa, which I saw for the first time back when the museum was up the hill in Wellington. I recognised it as art, but it wasn't necessarily made to be seen like that. The cool thing is the art that you see without knowing that it's art. The art that's part of everyday life. I saw sculptures, climbed on them, I never realised they were art. There was no public art back then like there is today. Just bronze versions of portraits that I'd seen in museums. Almost all men.

LS: You moved down to Ōtautahi 15 years or so ago. All of us in Christchurch shared a massive trauma during the earthquake years, 2010–11. There are many traumatic images from that time still in our heads and in our cameras, but everyone

experienced it differently. You responded to the earthquakes in a very practical and determined kind of way. *I seem to have temporarily misplaced my sense of humour* **(24)** was one of your initial responses. How did that work come about?

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WY: It was a period of trauma. It was insane to see stuff on television that looks like you're watching something from afar. I live out of town, so when it happened I went through a list of friends and family and loved ones, to make sure they were OK … it was real, it was so real, it was super fucking real.

I'm a glass half-full kind of guy. When I was asked to paint the mural, I thought that's a *huge wall*. Then I thought yeah, we'll have a crack at it. I had the title before I had any image: *I seem to have temporarily misplaced my sense of humour*. After the *Rated* show, I'd realised that there's a way into difficult scenarios through humour. Like a comedian who tells a joke that you're not sure whether you should laugh at. So once I get you engaged, once you've spent some time with the work, touched something that's furry, or bright yellow, or whatever, then we can have that talk about what I've *really* done. But I thought nope, I've got nothing for you. No side gags, no jokes. There was nothing funny about the earthquakes.

When I came up with the title, I was thinking about things that had been misplaced. After my oldest son Kupa was born, I started listening to talkback radio, and people were calling up saying what they'd lost. My favourite cafe's shut. I've lost my fox terrier. I've lost this, I've lost that. People who'd lost wedding rings, livelihoods, limbs. I thought about loss, and

how you point to something that's not there. My grandfather had a shed with a pegboard where if you borrowed something it had to be returned. His shadow-board was a checklist. He knew what was missing by its silhouette. All the objects were things people owned at one point but were no longer in their possession. So that mural had rings and kids' toys and PlayStations and houses. I always love a silhouette, because it's only the suggestion of information. I'm interested in how far can you take things away from the source before they become unrecognisable.

It was so lo-fi. But it was respected by not being graffitied, for about four years. When there was eventually some graffiti on it, Jenny Harper rang up and apologised. But it didn't matter. Remember all those beautiful handwritten signs that were exposed during the earthquakes on the sides of buildings, where another building had fallen down alongside it?

LS: The ghost signs.

WY: I hope that my painting gets built around and then exposed again at some time in the future.

LS: After that you made another big public work, *The House of Wellbeing* **(25)** at the Polytech. It was also about connecting to things that are important to people. There's a lot going on in that work!

(25) p.50

WY: The Whareora was being built, and I wanted to know what it was all about. I started it by wanting working water fountains. One of those *Rated* images was of segregated 'Black' and 'White' drinking

fountains. That's super offensive to me. I thought of the dumbness of an era where someone would have to use a different drinking fountain based on the pigmentation of their skin. In those times I wouldn't have been black enough to be black or white enough to be white. The fountains I designed for the Polytech were black and white checkers, because the Polytech is made up of different ethnicities. I wanted people to be awkward and close, with the drinking fountains set close together … And I wanted people to have a place to sit, too. I started to work backwards. The Polytech was getting young women back into work, so I added the portrait. Then on one side there was the poutama, with the idea of higher learning. It has all the symbology, but its colours are also steeped in meaning. If you're going to be given the colours of the rainbow to work with, and the materials of the world and its technologies, you might as well make it all mean something. You've got history to refer to. *The House of Wellbeing* has done its thing, it's a number of works put together, tucked in an alley. It's a nice thing.

LS: It's done its job.

WY: Exactly, it's done the job it was meant to do, like the mural did its job.

LS: What sort of job were you doing with the *Wish you were here* **(26)** works, from 2017?

(26) p.50

WY: Those had been planned for a long time, and my starting point was the city being rebuilt after the earthquakes. I've been obsessed for years with the idea of 'wish you were here'. It's quite a sad

expression – but it can also be joyful. I've been sent that phrase, tagged in on social media, people on an overseas trip saying *OMG, wish you were here, Wayne*. I didn't want the works to sing from the rooftops, just to do their thing quietly. I wanted them to be markers, so they shine. It's my imagery, made as a series of signs. At night they glow different colours of the rainbow … again, public artwork doesn't need to slap you in the face.

But making the *Wish you were here* works brought up issues … There were promises made about that area. The planners drew my artwork with families sitting there around it. People everywhere. Dogs playing fetch. That never happened. That still makes me angry. There was supposed to be water and trees and people. I ponied up with my part of the deal, like most artists do. But now it's just these videos and signs sitting in a carpark. Though I guess at least now art is part of the public discussion, and it never used to be.

LS: One of the silver linings of the earthquakes is the new prominence of Māori culture in the city's public spaces. You worked on the extraordinary tiled whāriki, along the river. They're among the best public works in Christchurch.

WY: I was humbled to be asked to do that. What I essentially did was translate Reihana Parata and Morehu Flutey Henare's drawings into a format where they could turn what was very organic – organic materials, tāniko, whāriki, weaving, all that – into something that was digital and formal. They're the most beautiful women, I'm a better person for working with them. I don't know if it's a Māori

thing, maybe it is, each work has a meaning based on its site. All of the patterns are contemporary or traditional, or they're contemporary versions of traditional work. There's the poppies in front of the Remembrance Bridge. Then a site where the food was collected and you've got kūmara leaves. They were a joy; they were unflappable, they were far more gracious than they needed to be.

LS: One of the most important things I've ever learned about public art was from Ian Athfield. It was a talk he gave to the Wellington Sculpture Trust years ago. The talk was in two parts. The first part, he showed public works of art in Wellington. They were beautiful, set against gorgeous blue skies. The second part of the talk, he did the same talk again but he showed the works as they really were experienced. So the Hotere/McFarlane sculpture on Lambton Quay had motorbikes parked in front of it. Others were seen with cafe tables and sandwich boards and rubbish. There's always a difference between the heroic way public art is photographed and how it's actually lived with. It's exactly the same as those idealised architectural renders you were talking about. But there, it's the failure to realise that urban fabric around the art works. The works were meant as a starting point for regeneration that hasn't happened.

WY: Those works, I feel sad about them, sometimes I just drive past and don't visit them. But on the flipside, when I've been quiet, I've seen people looking at the videos. It's like the *Rated* works, they're intimate. You don't see them until you're right there. There's a video of my mum, unwrapping a present. It means a lot to me. The gift that keeps

giving. Same as Christchurch. New things all the time. But Mum never gets to the end. There's no prize at the end. On the other side it's a drumroll, waiting for something. What? Just waiting.

LS: There's an implied critique in those works because of the context in which they were installed.

WY: It's one of those joyful things where they've actually had more meaning for the lack of follow through. Failed promise, whatever. It's like the monorail episode of *The Simpsons*. 'The monorail, the monorail, we're getting a monorail!' You're not getting a fucking monorail, you're getting a hat.

LS: In 2013 you made another show for City Gallery Wellington, 13 or 14 years after the *Rated* exhibition. How did it relate to your public work?

(27) p.50

WY: It was called *Fingers Crossed* **(27)**. It was quite directed and sinister, the idea of fingers crossed behind your back: speaking with a forked tongue and with false promises. I had both the Deane and the Hirschfeld Galleries. One was meant for Māori and Pasifika artists, the other for Wellington artists, so I asked to have them both at once. One work I painted in a flesh colour: I got paint colour matched to the lightest and the darkest parts of my own skin. Another work, I photocopied the English version of the Treaty of Waitangi 1,800 times – and you don't need to be a scholar to know that the translation was completely bungled. I mushed up the pages with a mulcher, mixed the paper with glue and made it into droppings that I put in a top hat. I was interested to think about the reoccurring guilt, the guilt of our forefathers that comes down the

generations, whether Māori or Pākehā. Another work was made using a stone from a church, from Christchurch. It had a sense of great pressure in it. I hung it from the ceiling. I'd found a taxidermied mouse – not an easy thing to find, it's laying down like a cat, on its side – and I put it under the hanging stone. It's a work that has just the right amount of trickery in it. The right amount of anticipation. We all know anticipation is 9/10ths of enjoyment in life. It's never as good when you get what you want, it's like eating fish and chips, it seems like a good idea at the time but you always feel a bit disgusted later.

LS: In Christchurch, you're counted as a local, you've been here 15 years and you know the place well. But you've spent time in another couple of cities where you've also thought deeply about the public sphere for artists. Sydney: you went there thinking about McCahon.

WY: I got the amazing opportunity to go to Sydney and work at Artspace in 2011. It was career changing. I know Sydney by walking around it every day for three months. I loved the contrast between my art bubble and the griminess and mayhem.

I was interested in the time McCahon went missing in Sydney, for 28 hours in total, in '84. I read Martin Edmond's book about McCahon's lost hours. Martin was more than willing to meet with me and we did the whole trip together. Great stories! His book is full of urban myths, it is an urban myth, and I liked that. My work has been full of that forever, what is true and what is not. Stories have their own life.

(28) p.51

LS: You're recently back from Berlin. What were you looking for there?

WY: I did crazy miles in Berlin, I went down alleyways, I went into shops, I met a lot of people. My work was text and image, a collection of old Polaroids I've been accumulating for as long as I've been down here, maybe even longer. I wrote two poems in Berlin: *40 Days and 40 Nights* **(28)**, ironically about Sydney. One was about one of my lowest times. I don't drink anymore. The last time I was really drunk was in Sydney. The *40 Nights* was about me being in Sydney. I put image and text together randomly. They were as random as you could get.

The opening line of the *40 Nights* poem was: *We're in for a long night, I tell my shoelaces*. Kazimir Malevich on asphalt. When you're sick your instant thought is Jackson Pollock, but it was very Malevich. I think back to my mum saying you don't chew your food properly, Wayne. In the day poem there's a line about the joys of sitting on a stump, and swinging your legs and realising that the stump had sap on it, and it's taken all the joy away, and you're like *'Ah fuck'*. Like sitting down in Wellington with a black dress on, looking out at the harbour, bird shits on you. I love those things. They're universal. Joy and love and luck and bad luck and down times. We've all had the bad times.

The *40 Days* poem was about me being a little bit older, having 15 acres in North Canterbury. Looking out of a roller door in the summer, at the boys, being a papa. Building treehouses. Life is good.

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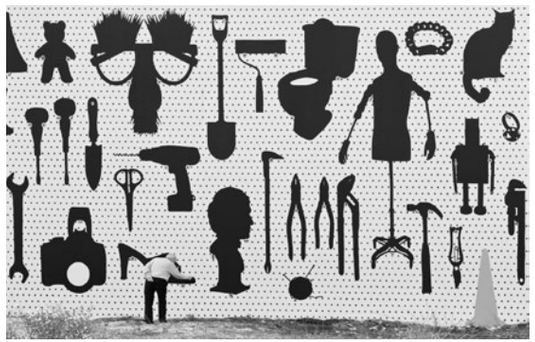

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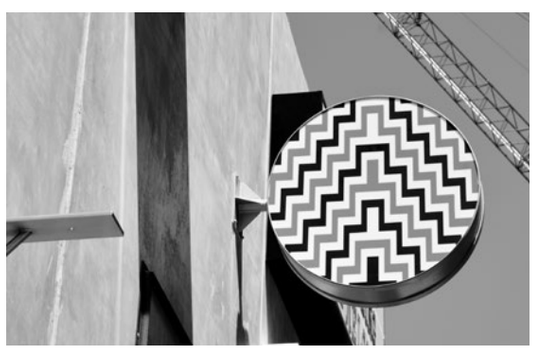

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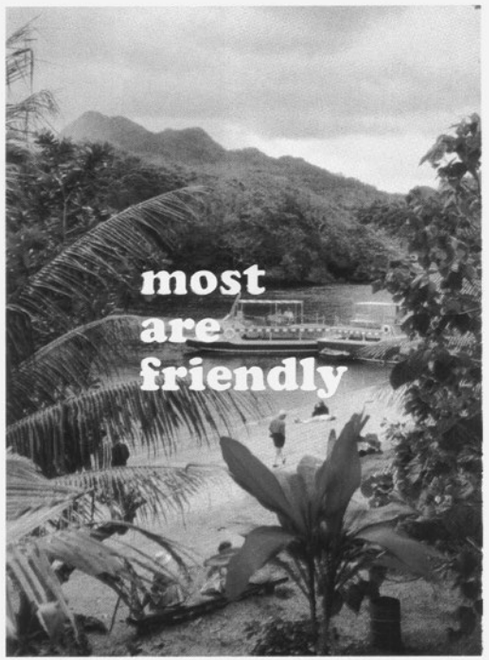

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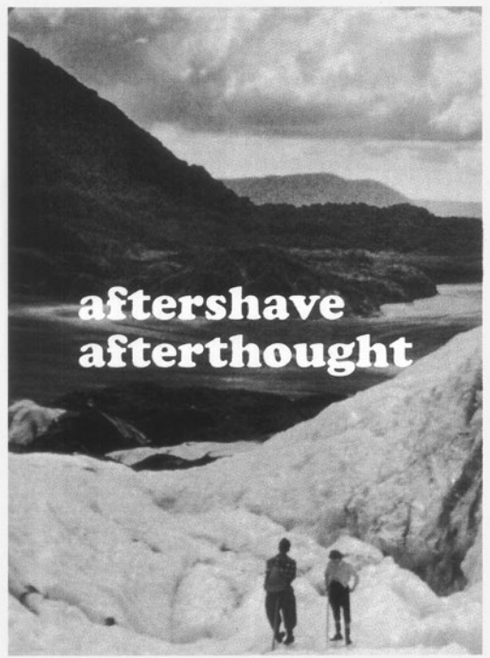

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20/20: words of wisdom


EASY


PEASY

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the artist

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I KNOW
I AM
NOT THE FIRST
AND I
DEFINITELY WONT BE
THE LAST

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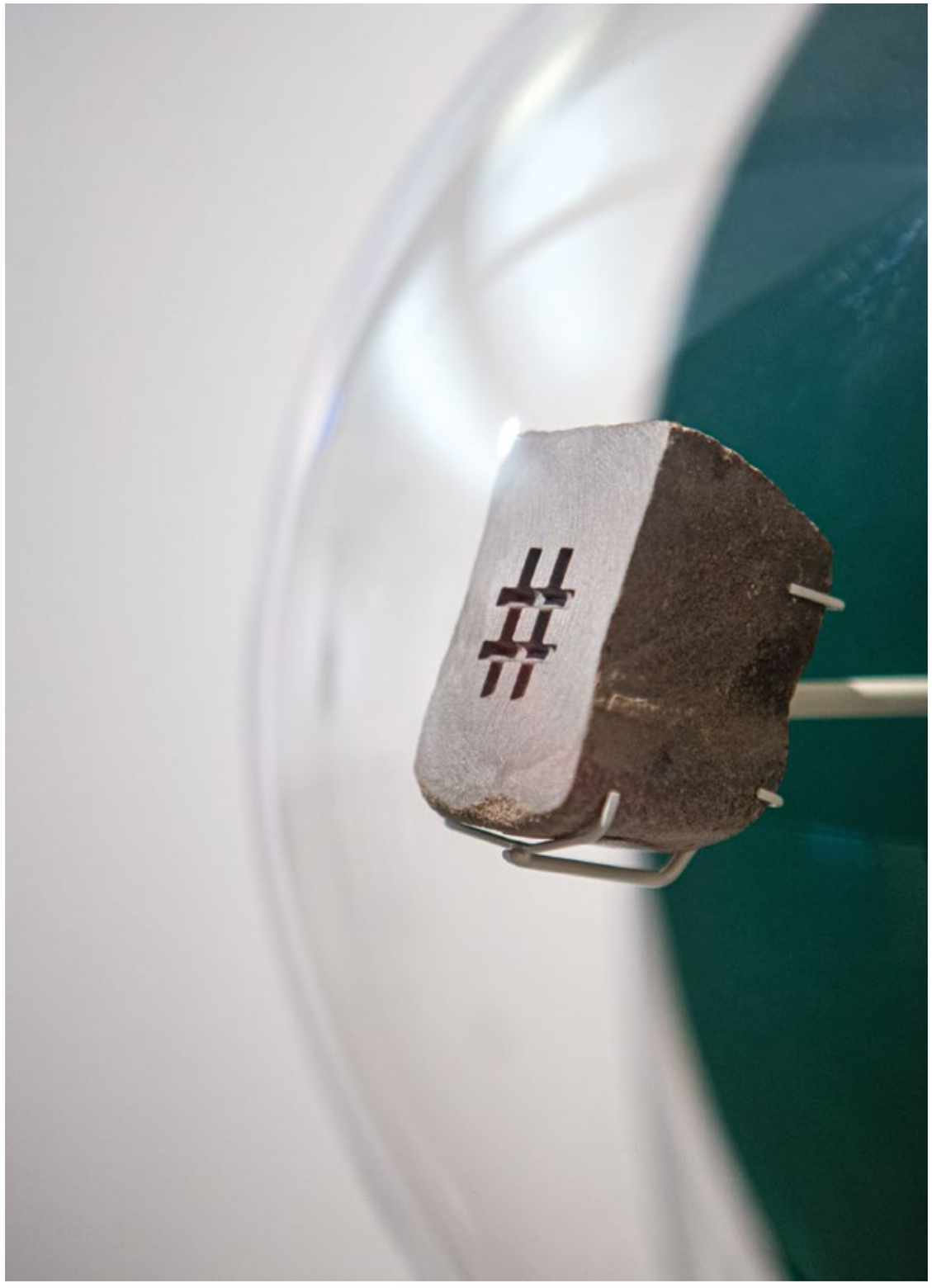

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IN
LOVING
MEMORY
OF
PAINTING
PHOTOGRAPHY
AND
SCULPTURE
IN A BETTER PLACE

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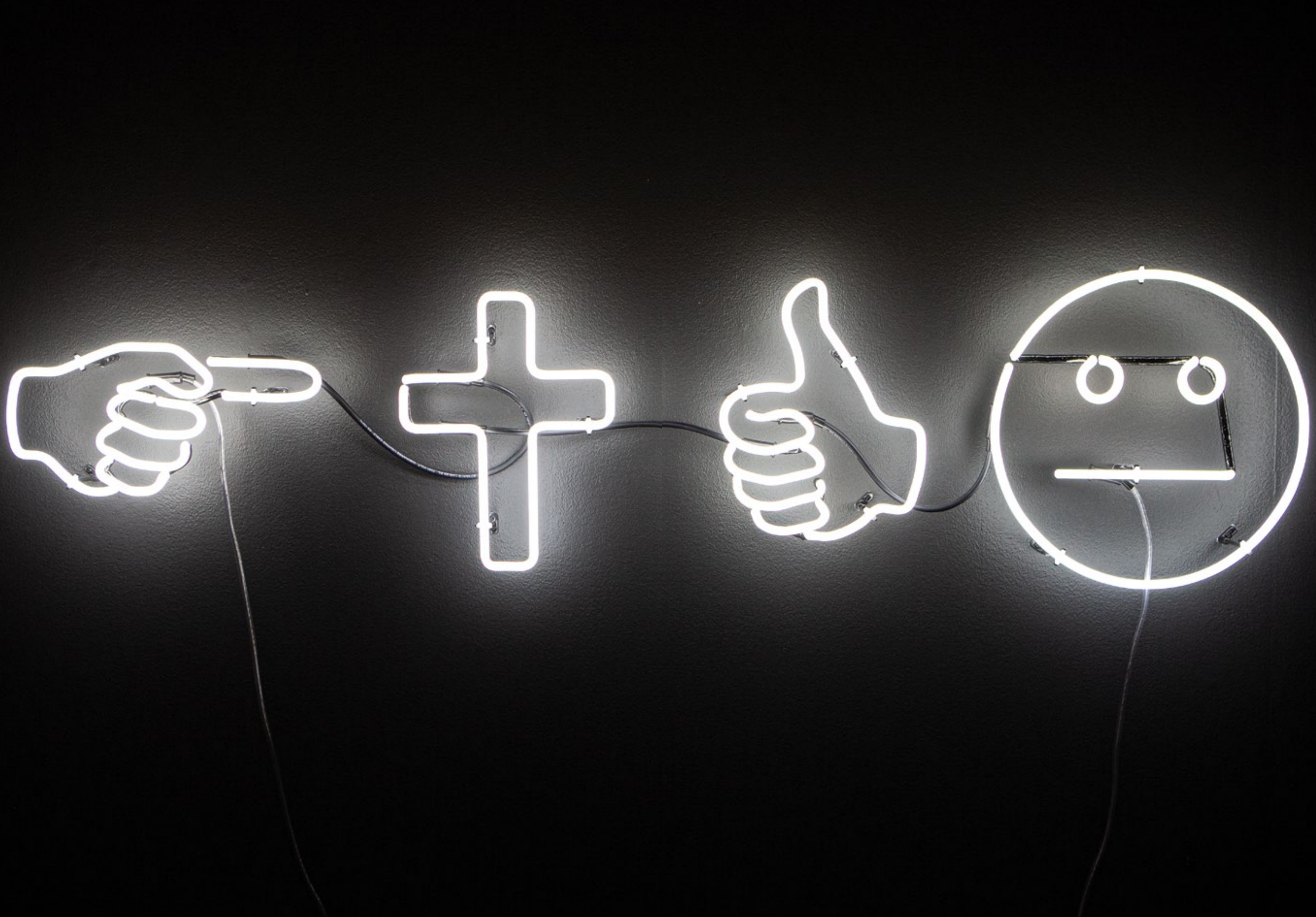

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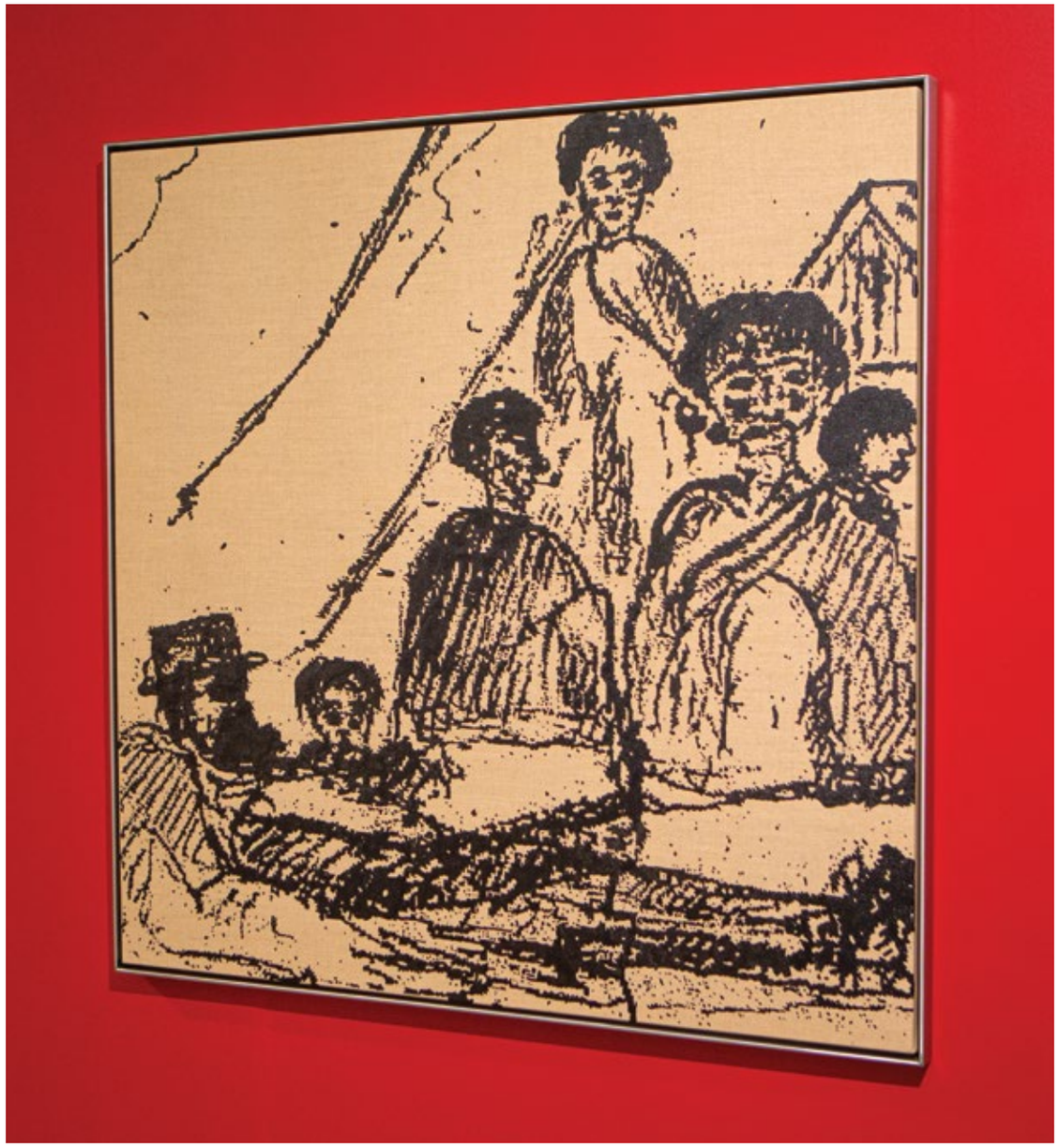

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THE SAVIOUR

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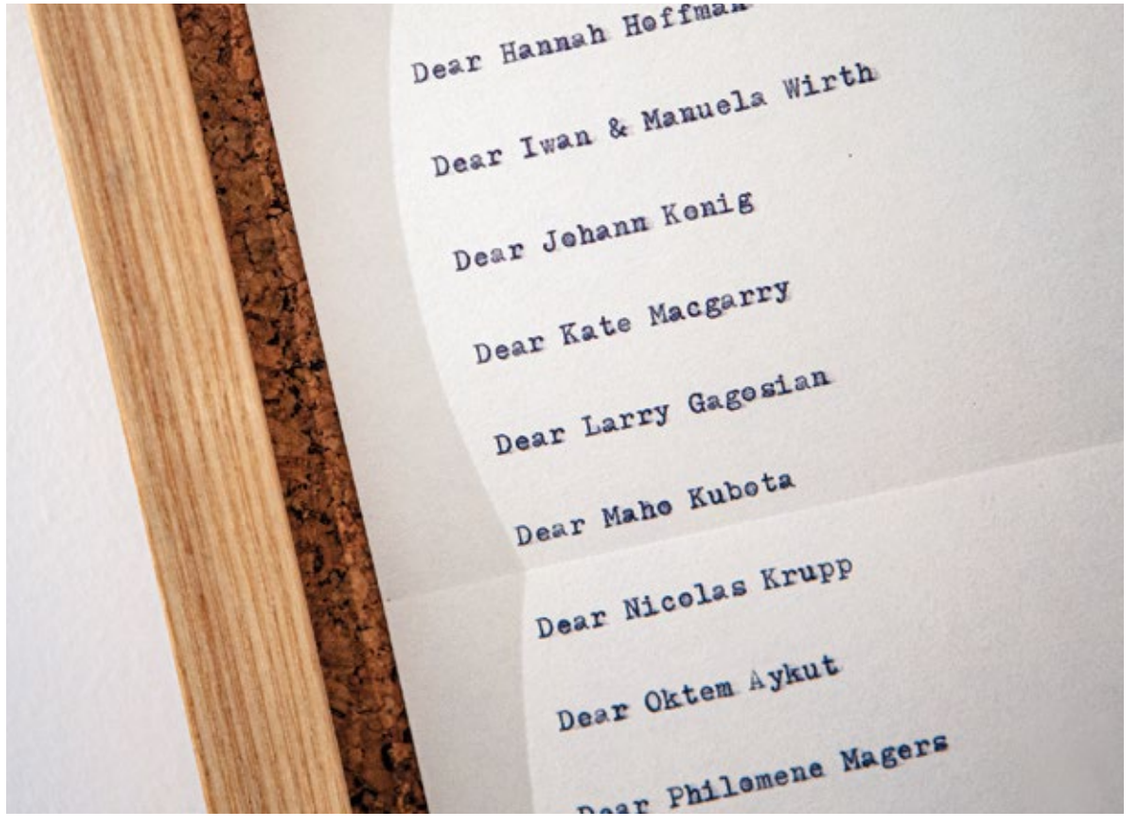
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Dear Iwan & Manuela Wirth
Dear Johann Konig
Dear Kate Macgarry
Dear Larry Gagosian
Dear Maho Kubota
Dear Nicolas Krupp
Dear Oktem Aykut
Dear Philomene Magers

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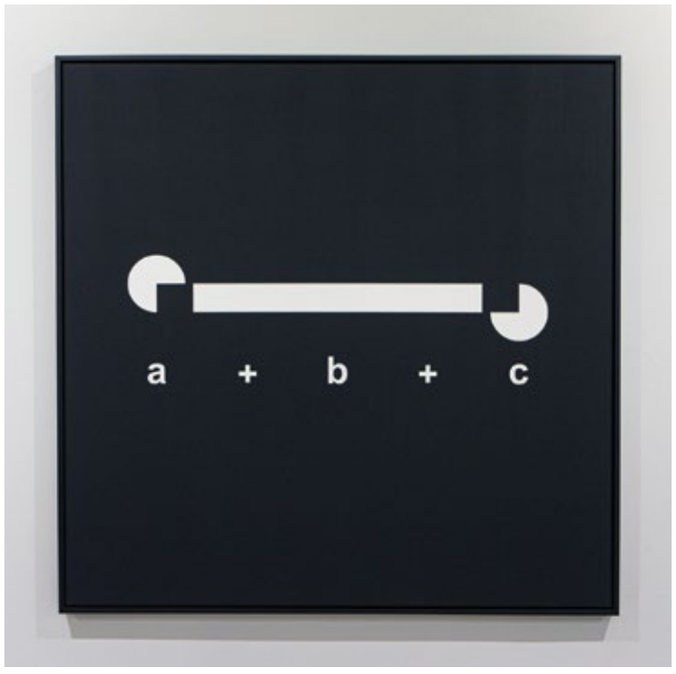

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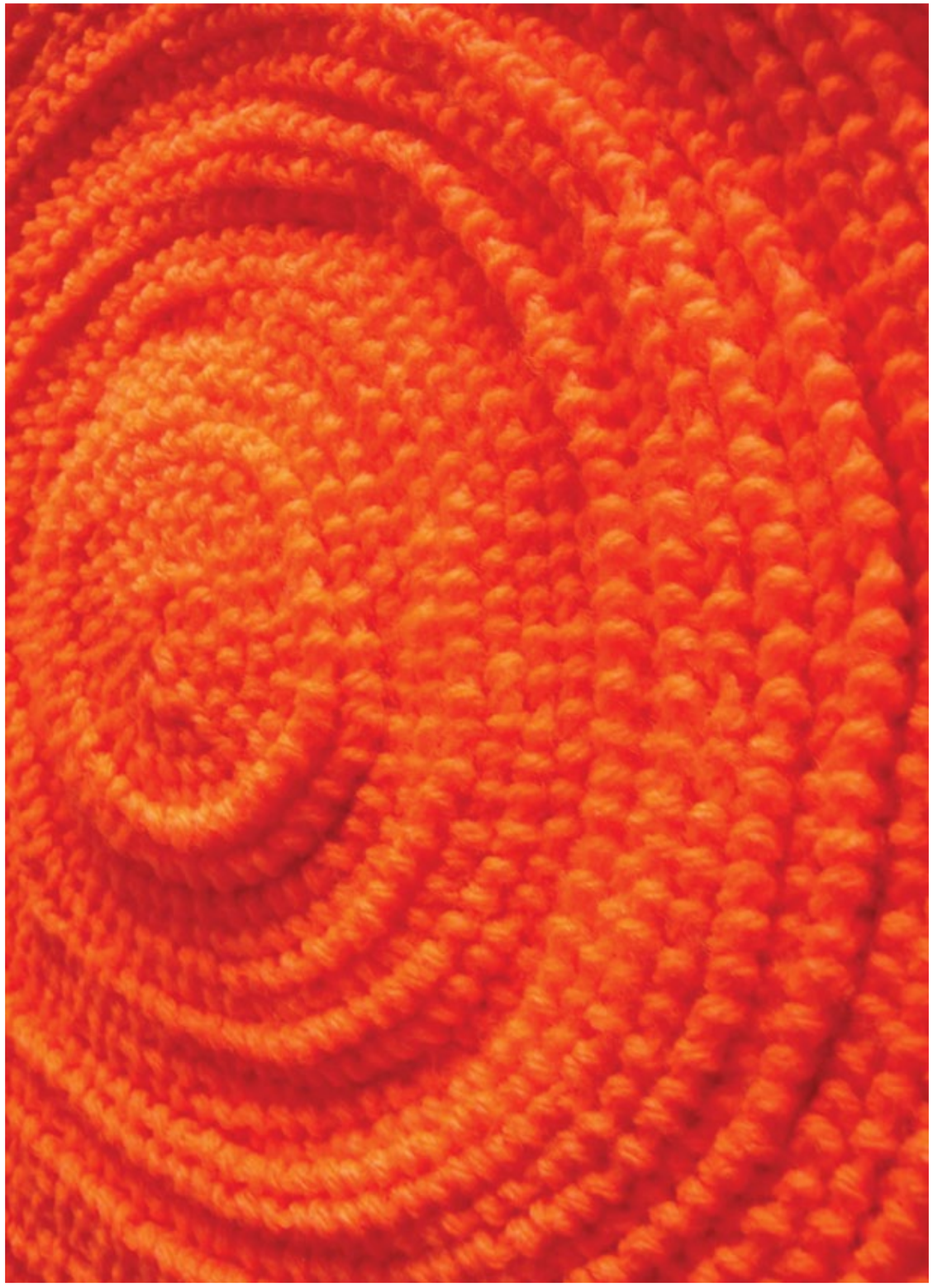

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Wayne Youle Biography

Wayne Youle (Ngāti Whakaeke, Ngāpuhi, Pākehā) was born at Kenepuru Hospital in Porirua in 1974. Attending Mana College, he was an avid athlete, playing rugby for the Norths Football Club and competing nationally and internationally surfboating with the Tītahi Bay Surf Lifesaving Club. Graduating from Wellington Polytechnic School of Design with a Bachelor of Design, majoring in Typography in 1999, he participated in his first art exhibition at Pātaka Art + Museum in 1998 and held his first solo exhibition *Rated 201* at City Gallery Wellington the following year. Moving to northern Amberley in Canterbury in 2003, Youle has maintained his connection to Porirua over the years, holding his ten-year survey exhibition *10 Down* at Pātaka in 2009, and his twenty-year retrospective *20/20: words of wisdom* at Pātaka in 2020. Youle is represented by {Suite} Gallery.

Selected Solo Exhibitions / Selected Group Exhibitions

20/20: words of wisdom, Pātaka Art + Museum, Porirua, New Zealand
Colonel Mustard in the study with the candlestick, {Suite}, Wellington, New Zealand, 2018
(UN) United Nations, {Suite}, Wellington, New Zealand, 2017
The Hoe and the Hōiho, Pātaka Art + Museum, Porirua, New Zealand, 2017
Look mum, no hands, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2017
Strangely Familiar, New Zealand Portrait Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand, 2017
Bad Idea, {Suite}, Wellington, New Zealand, 2016
The best stories ever told (revisited), Parlour Projects, Hawkes Bay, New Zealand, 2016
The best stories ever told (revisited), {Suite}, Wellington, New Zealand, 2016
9:54 | 3:49, Sydney Contemporary, Carriageworks, Sydney, Australia, 2015
Wayne Youle, {Suite}, Wellington, New Zealand, 2015
Maiden Voyage, {Suite}, Wellington, New Zealand, 2014
Vacancies, {Suite}, Wellington, New Zealand, 2014
You be Fact, I'll be Fiction, {Suite}, Wellington, New Zealand, 2013
So they say..., Tauranga Art Gallery, New Zealand, 2013
Fingers Crossed, Deane and Hirschfeld Galleries, City Gallery Wellington Te Whare Toi, New Zealand, 2012
Make Pretend, {Suite}, Wellington, New Zealand, 2012
One Step Forward, One Step Back, {Suite}, Wellington, New Zealand, 2011
"!?"....:)', {Suite}, Wellington, New Zealand, 2011
It's the Simple Things, {Suite}, Wellington, New Zealand, 2010
10 Down, Pātaka Art + Museum, Porirua, New Zealand, 2010
A Darker Kind of Light Heartedness, {Suite}, Wellington, New Zealand, 2009
The Icon 500, The Physics Room, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2005

Fifth {Suite} Summer Series, {Suite}, Wellington, New Zealand, 2017–18
Fourth {Suite} Summer Series, {Suite}, Wellington, New Zealand, 2017
Third {Suite} Summer Series, {Suite}, Wellington, New Zealand, 2016
Version 4.0, {Suite}, Wellington, New Zealand, 2015
Cut + Paste: The Practice of Collage, The Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt, New Zealand, 2015
If you were to live here..., 5th Auckland Triennial, Auckland, New Zealand, 2013
Never Mind the Pollocks, {Suite}, Wellington, New Zealand, 2012
Auckland Art Fair, {Suite}, Auckland, New Zealand, 2011
Close Encounters, Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago, USA, 2009
Plastic Māori, The Dowse, Lower Hutt, New Zealand, 2009
Board Art, CoCA, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2009
Another NZ Another United State, Mexico City, Tokyo, United States, 2008
Winners are Grinners, PICA, Perth, Australia, 2007
Pasifika Styles, University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, United Kingdom, 2006
Hei Tiki, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand, 2005
Manawa Taki, City Gallery Wellington, New Zealand, 2005

Public Artworks / Residencies / Publications & Reviews / Public Collections

The House of Wellbeing ALL WELCOME, Ara Institute of Canterbury, Madras Street Campus, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2016
I seem to have temporarily misplaced my sense of humour, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2011

McCahon House Artist in Residence, Titirangi, Auckland, New Zealand, 2019
Friends of Pātaka Artist in Residence, Pātaka Art+Museum, Porirua, New Zealand, 2014
SCAPE Artspace Artist in Residence, Sydney, Australia, 2011
Rita Angus Artist in Residence, Wellington, New Zealand, 2010

Sue Gardiner, *Wayne Youle*, Art Collector, July-September Issue 2018
Malcolm Burgess, *Wayne Youle: Bad Idea*, Art New Zealand, Auckland, Summer 2016–17
Jamie Hanton, *A multi-disciplinary man*, Art News NZ, Auckland, Winter 2015
Mark Amery, *States of Play*, Art Collector Magazine, Australia, Autumn 2015
Mark Amery, *The best paper, scissors rocks*, The Dominion Post, Wellington, April 2013
Capital Times, *Boundaries are for breaking*, Capital Times, Wellington, December 2012
Diana Dekker, *Punching Boundaries*, Dominion Post Weekend, Wellington, December 2012
Julie Hill, *The Undistracted Life*, Home New Zealand, Auckland, New Zealand, 2011
Ann Poulsen, *More than Meets the Eye*, Art New Zealand, Wellington, New Zealand, 2011
Roger Boyce, *Something Like Us*, Christchurch Art Gallery Bulletin, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2011
Mark Amery, *Report on Wayne Youle Survey Show at Pātaka*, Eyecontact website, November 2009
John Hurrell, *Cohesively Brilliant*, Eyecontact website, November 2009
Mark Amery, *Darkness on the edge of town*, The Big Idea, May 2009
Warwick Brown, *Seen this Century*, Random House, Auckland, New Zealand, 2009
Sarah Farrar, *And then there was Wayne*, LINO 5, New Zealand, 2004, pp. 118–122

Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Auckland, New Zealand
Christchurch Art Gallery, Te Puna o Waiwhetu, Christchurch, New Zealand
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, Taranaki, New Zealand
James Wallace Arts Trust, New Zealand, Auckland, New Zealand
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand
New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade Manatū Aorere
Pātaka Art + Museum, Porirua, New Zealand
Real Art Roadshow, Wanaka, New Zealand
The Suter Art Gallery Te Aratoi o Whakatū, Nelson, New Zealand
The University of Waikato Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato, New Zealand
Wellington City Council Collection, Wellington, New Zealand

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2012
Routered brass and enamel paint
Courtesy the artist
and {SUITE} Gallery

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2017
Mixed media
Collection of artist

(3) p.27 *Rated 201*
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35mm bw slide
Collection of artist

(4) p.27 *Hunting Natives at the Foot of the Mountain*
2001
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(5) p.27 *Often Liked, Occasionally Beaten*
2004
Resin
Private collection

(6) p.28 Wayne Youle and the Friends of Pātaka in front of *Listen for what the ruru has to tell you*
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diptych, acrylic on canvas
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(7) p.28 *Thanks to the magic of religion and television 1 and 2*
2006
Pine box with security TV
Dimensions variable

(8) p.28 Installation view of *10 Down*, Pātaka Art + Museum, 2009. Image courtesy of the artist. Youle's Gordon Walters and Michael Parekowhai inspired koru sculpture *Simple Mathematics* (2005–06) sits at the centre of the photograph. Flanked on the left is the painting *My Girlfriend's Mum* (2008).

(9) p.28 *When I grow up I want to be black*
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Polaroid detail
Private collection

(10) p.28 *Fingers Crossed* exhibition at City Gallery Wellington, 2012
Courtesy City Gallery Wellington

(11) p.28 Installation detail of *.454 kg of whatever and who really cares* featured in the *Fingers Crossed* exhibition at City Gallery Wellington, 2012
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Courtesy City Gallery Wellington

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Courtesy City Gallery Wellington

(14) p.29 Installation detail of *The Naughty Chair* featured in the *Fingers Crossed* exhibition at City Gallery Wellington, 2012
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(15) p.29 Installation detail of *Genius* featured in the *Fingers Crossed* exhibition at City Gallery Wellington, 2012
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(16) p.29 *I seem to have temporarily misplaced my sense of humour*
2011
Artwork Commissioned by Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū
Photo courtesy John Collie, Christchurch Art Gallery

(17) p.30 *The Gift That Keeps Giving*
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Collection of Christchurch City Council
Photo courtesy the artist

(18) p.31 *The Saviour*
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Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū
Photo courtesy Elias Rodriguez

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2015
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(22) p.34 *Blood, sweat and tears and the acknowledgment of persistence* (detail) 1992–2019
Courtesy the artist

(23) pp.48–49 *Rated 201*
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35mm B&W slides
Collection of artist

(24) p.50 *I seem to have temporarily misplaced my sense of humour* (detail) 2011
Artwork Commissioned by Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū and Gap Filler
Photo courtesy John Collie, Christchurch Art Gallery

(25) p.50 *The House of Wellbeing*
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2016
Mixed media
Commissioned by Christchurch City Council and Ōtākaro Ltd.
CPIT Aoraki collection
Photo courtesy the artist

(26) p.50 *Wish you were here*
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Photo courtesy the artist

(27) p.50 *Fingers Crossed* exhibition at City Gallery Wellington, 2012
Courtesy City Gallery Wellington

(28) p.51 *40 days and 40 nights*
2019
Risograph prints on Eco 100 paper
Courtesy the artist

(29) p.53 *Blood, sweat and tears and the acknowledgement of persistence* (detail) 1992–2019
Two watches
Dimensions variable
Collection of the artist and his old man

(30) pp.54–56 *If dad says no, ask mum and if she says no ask her Majesty*
2010
Beef bone
Dimensions vary
Private collection

(31) p.57 *As you were (6 parts)*
2. Easy – Peasy
2017
Sand blasted stone piles and happy face foam stress balls
175 × 280 × 140mm
Collection of the artist

(32) p.58 *My fact is no match for your fiction*
2014–2015
c-type print laminated on dibond and found wooden bases
1620 × 1120mm
Collection of the artist

(33) p.59 *History tells me*
2018–2019
13 pieces laser cut powder-coated aluminium
2170 × 1530mm
Collection of the artist, courtesy of {SUITE} Gallery

(34) pp.60–62 *Alone time*
2014
Mixed media
2400 × 3600 × 3200mm
Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū

(35) p.63 *As you were (6 parts)*
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2017
Sand blasted Italian marble and foam balls
430 × 610 × 30mm
Collection of the artist and Michael Reid Gallery SYDNEY + BERLIN

(36) pp.64–66 *I see you, sunny disposition, optimism and hope*
2018–2019
Stainless steel, coloured glass, walnut timber, electrical components and found objects
1335 × 900 × 900mm
Collection of the artist
*Bronze cigarette by Jonathan Campbell and bronze arrow by Iain Cheesman

(37) p.67 *As you were (6 parts)*
3. Hashtag
2019
Sand blasted Berlin stone
65 × 40 × 160mm
Collection of the artist

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2013
Acrylic on canvas
300 × 300mm
Collection of the artist, courtesy of {SUITE} Gallery

(39) p.69 *POUND CO.*
cash and or flesh accepted
2012–2013
Found brass letters and mahogany
Dimensions variable
Collection of the artist, courtesy of {SUITE} Gallery

(40) p.70
As you were (6 parts)
6. We shall rise again like a phoenix from the ashes… the same but different
2015
Enamel on black granite
600 × 400 × 75mm
Private collection

(41) p.71
As you were (6 parts)
5. Ruru
2019
Sand blasted Akaroa Volcanic stone and timber
495 × 200 × 200mm (including shelf)
Collection of the artist

(42) pp.72–73
☞✝👌😑
2019
Neon
370 × 1500mm
Collection of the artist, courtesy of {SUITE} Gallery, Wellington

(43) p.74
And he was like
And they were like
And then he was like
And she was like
And that was like…
You know
2019
Enamel on linen
1120 × 1120mm
Collection of the artist

(44) p.75
As you were (6 parts)
4. I am an artist too
2017
Sand blasted stone pile
300 × 195 × 125mm
Collection of the artist

(45) p.76
The Saviour
2012
Fibreglass, mahogany, leather, ply, electrical components
1310 × 1270 × 813mm
Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū

(46) p.77
Go-getter
2016
Typed A4 paper
350 × 500mm framed
Collection of the artist

(47) p.78
UNTITLED
(as one seems unnecessary)
2000
Acrylic on canvas
1000 × 1000mm
Collection of the artist

(48) p.79
Sleeping Dad
2014–2015
Wool and acrylic felt on linen
1220 × 1820mm
Collection of the artist

(49) p.80
Heavy is the air we breathe when it is the breath we use for judging others
2010
Wood-dyed hand-turned rimu and powder coated steel
270 × 220 × 220mm
Collection of the artist

(50) p.81
Genius
2012–2013
Found walking sticks
Dimensions vary
Collection of the artist

(51) p.82
I'll be the one wearing the pink carnation, standing in the corner (sweating)
2017
Mixed media
2000 × 850 × 850mm
Collection of the artist

(52) p.83
I is what I is
2008
Mataī and snooker balls
480 × 400 × 360mm
Collection of the artist

(53) p.84
Portrait of Self
2008
Mataī and snooker balls
480 × 400 × 360mm
Collection of the artist

(54) p.85
SURPRISE
NATIVES
LOL
2010–2019
18 hand-sewn nautical flags
Collection of the artist

(55) p.86
When I grow up I want to be black
2006
Polaroid photograph
80 × 80mm
Collection of Tim Melville

(56) pp.87–89
Piece of string
2006
Hand-knitted acrylic wool
240mm × varying length
Private collection, Auckland

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