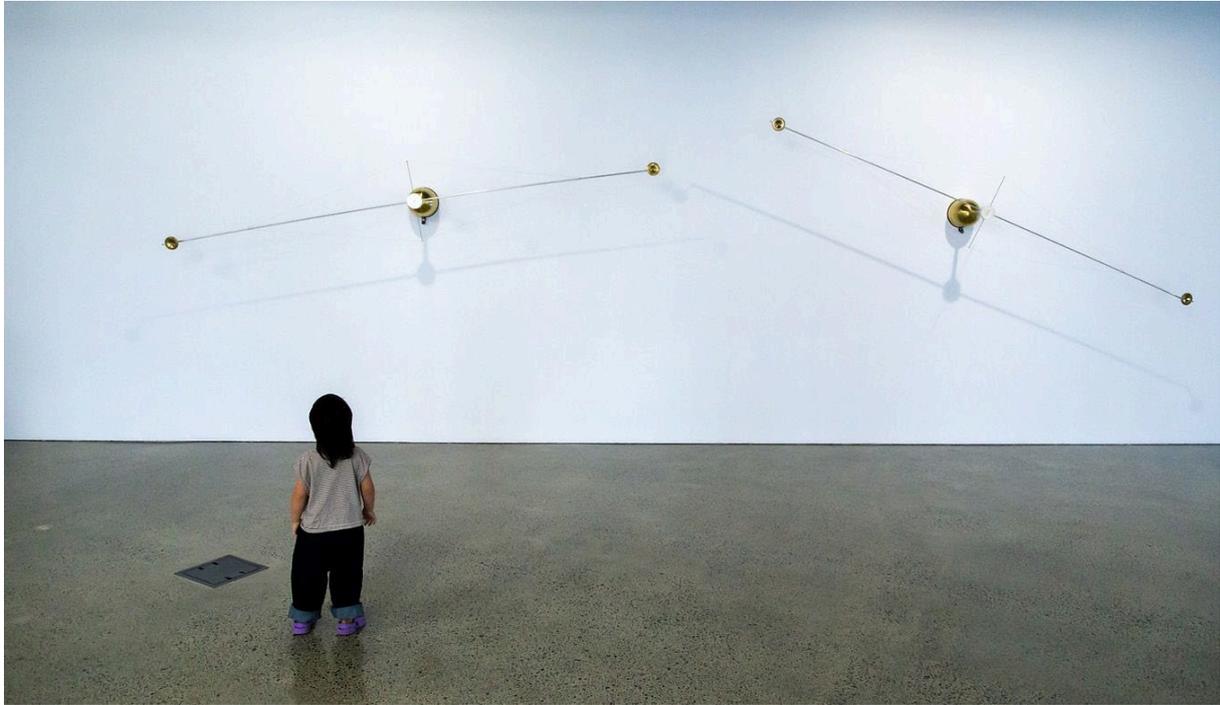


'Breathing Space/ Space Breathing'

A conversation with artists Michelle and Yana.

April 2023



'Turning', 2023, St PAUL'S Street Gallery 1. photo by Dr Rachel Spronken-Smith

Host Ziggy Lever brought together BVA AUT 2023 sculpture students and interdisciplinary installation artists Michelle Mayn, and Yana Dombrowsky-M'Baye. Gathering in the centre of 'BREATHING SPACE/SPACE BREATHING' an iterative installation by Lucy Boermans, Michelle Mayn, Yana Dombrowsky-M'Baye, and Shelley Simpson we sat down in a circle before beginning a discussion into the contexts and the building narrative of the installation.

Within the room over the recent months leading to our discussion the exhibition was affected by the floods throughout Northland New Zealand summer of 2023. Direct and indirect contexts due to the effect of the floods held the room. Through this circumstance, the context of the work revolved. Ziggy Lever expressed, "The context came to you." Indeed, the floods had moved and soiled the artwork in the space. This

change was an opportunity to respond to the uncontrollable elements of creating artwork.

The idea of the continuum within the constant change and effect brought out an interesting discussion in the group. We questioned “Is there a beginning middle or end as most narratives consist of? Has there been a break in the space – perhaps the unexpected toxicity of the flood waters? Arriving at a collective understanding that the flood was just another chapter in the story of this install. The reinstallation processes seemed to be important for the Artists as much as the work itself.

In addition to the concept of the continuum, the hum of the machines and bells in the gallery has been linked with the hum of the building’s air conditioner. Everyone in the room had previous occupancy in the building over the weeks prior to the discussion. Yanna expresses the serenity of the bells as she hears them echoing throughout the levels of the sky riser. It is important for audiences to think about the ways an artwork exists not just in a walled room but an entire building, a neighbourhood.

On another level, we can consider the relevance of the past present, and future as contributors to artwork. Yana concluded, “We attempt to clean the space after an exhibit but there is always a trace, there is always evidence. The traces of art. “Art seeps beyond the present moment as it draws on memory and sense, time and happening. This conversation left each person with a renewed understanding of the lasting effect art can have despite the changes that occur over time such as place, audience, or appearance.

Reference:

- Lucy Boermans, Michelle Mayn, Yana Dombrowsky-M’Baye and Shelley Simpson. *‘BREATHING SPACE/SPACE BREATHING,’* Gallery One, Saint Pauls Gallery. Auckland, 28 Jan 2023-11 Mar 2023.

<https://stpaulst.aut.ac.nz/> <https://www.metamoderncreatives.com/>

'The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and Tuning of the World.'
'Part One: First Soundscapes, Voices of the sea.' By R.Murry Schafer

Annotation By Britney Saywell 2023



Figure 1: 'Water view,' East Auckland, Britney Saywell. 11 Mar 2023.

Figure 2 'Water view B,' East Auckland, Britney Saywell. 11 Mar 2023.

R. Murray Schafer's writing on Soundscapes poses the idea that the sound of water is the first sound to exist in relation to the human ear. Pulling on Greek mythology and elaborating on a parallel between the sounds apparent in the womb. Schaffer¹ presents, "What was the first sound? The caressing of the waters." The fetus's ear within the amniotic acid emulates the caressing waters.

I find Schaffer's language used to describe the sounds and their differentiations, evoke vivid images in the mind. Reading has become an encounter with the author's deep respect to sound. The writing provokes a multitude of questions and wonderment about sound as any good text should show toward its subject. Leading you to a greater intrigue and a depth of knowledge.

In conversation with a friend, Donald Goodhall², He shared the experience of being present in his children's water births. "They can stay under the water, and it is completely fine. It is when you bring them, up from the water and they inhale air, this is a baby's first moment that they rely on air to breathe." This conversation brought real-

¹ R.Murry Schafer, *'The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and tuning of the world.'* Destiny Books. Vermont 1977 -1994 pg 15.

² Donald, GoodHall. *'Conversation with Donald Goodhall,'* Two Room café. Auckland, 16 March 2023.

life experience to support the question, "What was the first sound?" Hooked on the idea of an origin sound, I considered the ways that sound reflects our environment thus affecting our experiences in the world.

R. Murry Schaffer's audience is anyone who cares for their environment. This Earth is a great symphony that we are born into. Our ears are blessed by the sound of the land, the waters, and the skies. Schaffer protests that each person would do their part to keep the sound of the natural world alive rather than crush them under industrial sound.

Suggesting that the Western world is disconnected from the ancient soundtrack from Earth's first sound.

“Stone Walks: inhuman animacies and queer archives of feeling”
by Stephanie Springgay and Sarah. E. Truman. 2016



“Stone Walks: Inhuman Animacies and Queer Archives of Feeling” by Stephanie Springgay and Sarah. E. Truman critiques present Western modes of archive. Springgay highlights the idea of the impossibility to capture a cultural dance or the feeling of people who experience a historic event. The alternative archive modes that Springgay and others have explored is ultimately realized in the experimental practice of ‘Stone Walks.’ This method acknowledges the animacy of inhuman objects. Encouraging a participant to view the landscape they are walking without their perception at the centre of the experience. Lacking in a relation to self. Rather, a human is just another animate object among the rocks and the shell of a seashore. From this thought one is invited to archive their experience with an object or objects. This is an open-ended encounter and may look like a piece of writing, a photograph, a movement, or drawing, etc.

This walking methodology doesn’t call for a reason or purpose outside of present encounters within the land. Springgay presents, “Stone Walks as speculative propositions require that we learn with the world rather than about it(S.S. 2016).” Learning with the world exists within this practice although isn’t to be contained to the time limit of a stone walk. Rather, Springgay expresses an anthropologic view, as she acknowledges the animacy of inhuman objects. Sharing the Western counterpart to her thinking, “Along with not being alive, rocks were also not considered dead, because to be dead assumed the capacity for life(S.S. 2016).” Stephanie Springgay regards stones as living beings with their own memories and origins. This concept lives outside of the practice. I can conclude that a stone walk is more than an instruction or invitation to

Annotation 2023. Britney Saywell.

experience differently. Stone walks are a lifestyle. Stone walking can fully encapsulate your view of the land around you as one stretches the borders of an existing ontology of the Land. Where every stone you come across is living.

- S.Springgay and S.E.Truman. "*Stone Walks: inhuman animacies and queer archives of feeling*," Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, Canada 2016.
- Photo - '*Collecting a Rock 1-6*,' May 2022 Melons Bay. Britney Saywell.

'Instructions for the Land'
'A Door to The North' 2013 Juliet McLachlan



'Wetland, Tussock,' May 2023, Whitford NZ, Photo by Abbey Falconer.

'Instructions for the Land,' is a poem written by 7-year-old New Zealand writer Juliet McLachlan.¹ Consisting of two stanzas, an old knowledge of the land is expressed. McLachlan addresses, 'Landscape' as a being or life source. Through this personification, the landscape of Aotearoa is treated with respect and honour. The poem acknowledges the complex emotion of the Landscape. From great joys to deep sadness, the earth groans. Juliet McLachlan has written from a perspective, not of the current Western construct. Rather, of an indigenous understanding, specifically the Māori of Aotearoa.

¹ 'A Door To The North' 2013 Juliet McLachlan 'Instructions for the Land' pg23

'Kia Whakanuia Te Whenua, People, Place and Landscape,' 2021 by Carolyn Hill² addresses in her foreword, 'Listen to The Land,' movements within New Zealand towards a Māori understanding of Land. *Whanganui River Act 2017* is used as an example. In the act was the first time in the {western} world a river was recognized as a being with its own life and rights.' This acknowledgment is mirrored in McLachlan's writing, "Landscape, put your life in me." The turning of understanding the landscape's role in our human lives is vital. The Land is not separate from us for we cannot live without the life source of this planet.

I would press even further into this concept. '.. spread the heart of yours across the plains and hills and lakes." McLachlan asks of the land. "I am the river; the river is me. If the river is dying, so am I." Hill refers to the Māori locals of Whanganui's relationship with the river. Through the expressions from McLachlan and Hill, we move from a separation between land and humans to both land and human being intertwined. Landscape is not just another life we live alongside. Landscape is us and we are the land.

² 'Kia Whakanuia Te Whenua, People, Place and Landscape,' 2021 by Carolyn Hill – pg 31

'Swamps which might doubtless easily be drained.' By Geoff Park.
[Essay 12] **'Geoff Park, Theatre Country. Essays on Landscape and Whenua.'** 2006



Photographs of Northland.¹

“Maori labours digging a drainage ditch in the Kaitaia wetlands, Northland (North Island). Despite many Maori opposing the draining of wetlands, many Maori participated in draining operations employed as labourers by the Department of Public Works. Such work was one of the few waged-jobs available for Maori in rural areas, with economic necessity seeing Maori choose to partake in such schemes even if they objected to such practices.”

¹ Source: Northwood Brothers: Photographs of Northland. Alexander Turnbull Library. Ref: 1/1-10653-G, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.]

https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Maori-labours-digging-a-drainage-ditch-in-the-Kaitaia-wetlands-Northland-North-Island_fig5_298915024

Swamp, peatland, bog, or wetland, the landscape British colonialists labelled 'Wasteland.' *'Swamps Which Might Doubtless Easily Be Drained.'* an essay by Geoff Park explores the trauma of Aotearoa's Wetland due to the British attempt to cultivate farmland. An imperial landscape. As a reader, you are revealed to the happenings of the past through a lens of empathy. Park doesn't rate one people group over another – Māori and Pakeha. Rather, Park's care is for the land. To tell the story of the Wetland and the loss of life in its disregard.

A great deal of research into the writings of early colonialists and prior settlers in New Zealand. Park shares the perspectives of Cook and his crew. Looking over the swamp that dominated much of inland Aotearoa, Cook saw no life. Māori seemed to have no holding of the land. However, Cook could not have been more wrong. Through Park's research of Māori representatives from the late 1800's we discover to late the role of the wetland to the Māori folk. The Tangatawhenua hid throughout the wetland through secret pathways and passages. Wetland was the most fruitful part of the landscape as it was food, medicine, and a resource. Māori held a high regard for lowland swamps in the traditional Māori landscape.

Today we see how farmland is a huge part of Northland, New Zealand. Many of my friend's families farm out in Whitford and Clevedon. Traveling through the roads you will reach an opening from the trees and hilly areas. The opening looks out over a huge flat area with the Bombay hills far rising in the distance. This site is the definition of ecological imperialism. This stretch of farmland with mass flooding whenever the rains come would have been a part of the Haruki swamp before the British drained and processed the land to create wealth for their kingdom. Visiting in the early morning Fog smothers the land. But as soon as it lifts a sight of the fenced land plot and old Non-native trees peaks are revealed.



Clevedon flooding

George Park expressed how ecologists are asked to reveal history as well as point to a redeemable future for the land. His faith in wetland restoration for inland New Zealand is doubtful. Park expresses, "The ecological effect of swamp drainage in New Zealand was as though a major organ like the heart had been ruptured and removed." Wetlands are a treasure that we have lost along with many of the other aspects of our beloved land. We are now left to do our part to preserve the little swamp we have left.