

‘Whistling River’

Installation, November 2023.

Materials

Collected from the coastal wetlands along the Turanga Creek located in Whitford, East Auckland, New Zealand: Clay at various stages of heat engagement, silt, shell/ calcium dust under heat processes, and salt water. Found decaying wood, Toetoe, Glass wort, Tussock grass, and reeds. Shell and clay dust from previous installations.

Four contact prints: paper and ink.

Twine, Scrim contact print

Over the last two years, I have built an iterative making process in relationship with East Auckland coastal wetlands. The installations, ‘*The Silence Sings*’ October 2022, ‘*Scorched Silence*’ April 2023, ‘*Undercurrents*’ May 2023, ‘*Dust I Am Not*’ May 2023, ‘*Unguided Endeavour*’ June 2023, and ‘*Stilted Wrack Line*’ September 2023 have cultivated my relationship with the land. The history of this wetland has fascinated me.

This latest installation ‘*Whistling River*’ November 2023, maps sound in the environment as I navigate my way through the coastal wetland. Encountering this installation an individual is met by material from land many tend not to venture into. Wetlands may lack worth to other environments along the coasts. This should not be the case.

A fluid mapping unveils the experience of a soundscape. This installation honours the low areas where sound travels across the wetland. When in the wetland, I am listening out for sounds that sit behind my ears, just outside of my perception. The Turanga River is centered on this sound map.

Might we revive the sensations of a lost sound, dead on the
riverbed?

I carry a reflective manner over the land ownership and ecology concerns in the sites I engage with. As I record in the landscape, I follow alternate paths and rhythms. I consider the historical influences over the current experience of the site. The Turanga Creek running through this tidal wetland is a site of overlapping histories and timescales, under constant erasure and change. Through research it is believed the Tainui waka arrived in Aotearoa via the Turanga River, anchoring on a large volcanic rock. Engaging in this history; I field record myself whistling as I cultivate imagery of this historical event occurring on the river in front of me.

I'm interested in an installation's ability to host an experience, memory, and the sensation of a landscape. In making this work, I visited the site regularly, and over time built a relationship with the place at hand, responding through an intuitive making process. I engage with the act of alternative conjectural recording to reimagine this site through iterative offsite installations. Sounds in the landscape act as a guide throughout the making. I often map these sounds out in the installation from my time experiencing the world.

As I make with collected matter from a landscape, I am not asking for the material to perform. Concerned for both inhuman and human. I seek to facilitate space for memories to interact. Empowering the animacy that all humans and inhuman life carry.

Britney Saywell 2023.