

# artnews

NEW ZEALAND

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Summer 2013



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TESSA LAIRD ♦ ISTANBUL BIENNIAL ♦ BONDI SCULPTURE UPDATE  
JOSEPHINE CACHEMAILLE ♦ CHRIS POLE ♦ WOMEN TAKE CHARGE



**COVER:** Francis Upritchard, *Jockey*, 2012, modelling material, foil, wire, paint 49 x 30 x 39cm. Courtesy of the artist and Kate MacGarry, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, gift of the Patrons of the Auckland Art Gallery, 2013

In this issue Judy Millar writes about the art world's current love affair with artists engaging with utopian ideals and working outside the mainstream, and how their work is increasingly being exhibited in respected galleries and museums. One example is theosophist painter Hilma af Klint who believed her work was produced in collaboration with higher spirits and whose remarkable abstract paintings were never exhibited during her lifetime, yet are now attracting critical acclaim. A local example is outsider artist Robert Rapson whose wonderful expressionist ceramics won him the 2013 Premier Portage Ceramic Award.

Although this radical reassessment of context and the collapse of distinctions between insiders and outsiders is something to celebrate because it enriches and widens our experience of art, it can also create inappropriate readings, which the artist would never have intended.

A radical rethinking of context is also central to Alain de Botton and John Armstrong's wonderful book, *Art as Therapy*, which is reviewed in this issue. They make the point that, although we're told art has an importance almost equivalent to the meaning of life, we're often underwhelmed and feel inadequate when we visit galleries and museums. They say the fault is not ours but lies in the way art is taught, sold and presented by the art establishment. At a basic level, the authors say, our relationship to art is weakened by a profound institutional reluctance to grapple with the legitimate question of what art is actually for. Their inspirational answer is that art is a tool we can use to help us address daily dilemmas, such as how to notice and appreciate our daily surroundings despite being snowed under in our job; how to introduce the missing spark and passion into our love life; how to deal with grief; how to remember important factual and sensory information, and so on. Their choice of works and the life lessons these can teach us is visionary.

Also exploring notions of spiritual and intellectual enlightenment are the rainbow-hued ceramic sculptures of Auckland artist Tessa Laird, whose work is profiled in this issue. As part of her Doctor of Fine Arts, Laird set out to recreate her entire bibliography – in clay. This labour of love culminated in over 100 clay 'books' and a luminous publication, titled *A Rainbow Reader*, which meditates on colour as a palpable, powerful force. Laird's fascination with non-western cultures and alternative philosophies is a rainbow thread interwoven through her art and writing.

The process of re-envisioning art's function and proposing its potential for healing and enlightenment, in what are extremely challenging times, is an exciting development that seems to be gathering force.

On that note, I hope you find much richness and food for thought in this issue of *Art News*. Have a great summer!

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Francis Upritchard  
*Yellow & Black Gown* (detail) 2012  
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki  
Image courtesy of  
Kate MacGarry London.

See this work in  
*Freedom Farmers:*  
*New Zealand Artists*  
*Growing Ideas*

# A FREE ENTRY

New Zealand art:  
A summer showcase of new  
exhibitions and special events

AUCKLAND  
ART GALLERY  
TOI OTĀMAKI

## Notions of freedom in question

At the heart of an exhibition at Auckland Art Gallery is the notion that artists are free thinkers and energetic innovators.

This ambitious show *Freedom Farmers: New Zealand Artists Growing Ideas* presents a selection of work by 20 emerging and experienced artists and gives viewers a snapshot of New Zealand contemporary art right here, right now at Auckland Art Gallery. With its comprehensive mix of painting, video, photography, sculpture and installation works, the exhibition offers a rich visual experience.

Curated by Natasha Conland, the exhibition's overarching idea positions artists as innovators and leaders in New Zealand, which as a culture values invention, forward thinking and liberty.

A range of themes is explored, including consequences arising from the way we choose to live our lives. Auckland's burgeoning population problems are the subject of Dan Arps' new installation *rehab/daycare/tower-block/corrections*, which examines the community living in Auckland's infamous leaky Hobson Gardens apartment complex. This work examines the way communities deal with the physical pressures of the built environment.



Martin Basher, *Free Spirit No Interest*, 2009, installation view, Starkwhite, Auckland

There are several works exploring the natural landscape. Wayne Barrar's striking photographic series of Stewart Island shows the encroachment of aggressive foreign grasses that are killing off indigenous species; and Xin Chen's work investigates alternative lifestyle sculptures in select Asian cultures. Steve Carr's hauntingly beautiful film celebrates stereotypical West Auckland culture while acknowledging the natural beauty of that environment.

New York-based Martin Basher returns home with his lens firmly on the sublime. He comments on representations of utopia in advertising and public relations. Also addressing utopian communities and beliefs, Francis Upritchard's recent figurative sculptures have the appearance of a group of some lost tribe of soothsayers. They are cryptic, ancient and mystical in appearance, yet somehow very much of our time. Dorota Broda's work, *Power to you*, looks to the commercial world and addresses perceived versus actual freedom. Et al.

Francis Upritchard, *Blue and Green Scarf*, 2012, modelling material, foil, wire, paint, human hair. Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. Gift of the Patrons of the Auckland Art Gallery, 2013



evokes ideas of freedom in their installation, which reaches outside the gallery to the auditorium space adjacent to Albert Park and comments on the role of institutions by creating a pseudo-educational learning environment.

In Stella Corkery's paintings we see freedom explored at a very practical level. Well known as being a stalwart on the alternative music scene and one of New Zealand's pioneer female drummers, she presents a series of improvised paintings that reflect her musical approach and background. The media included in *Freedom Farmers* extends into the digital domain with an interactive mobile app created by Elam graduate Shannon Novak, which allows users to reveal his work across other artworks and in gallery spaces.

Opening at the start of the summer season, when many people escape to the great outdoors, the show offers an alternative freedom for people to explore.

*Freedom Farmers: New Zealand Artists Growing Ideas* is at Auckland Art Gallery from 26 October 2013 to 23 February 2014. Entry is free. A full programme of artist talks and events complements this comprehensive show. For more information visit [aucklandartgallery.com](http://aucklandartgallery.com).



Steve Carr, *Burn Out*, 2009, (still), 16mm film transferred to digital video, 4mins 53 secs