



## **Materiality of Time:** Speculative Systems and Drifts in Art

Lynette Wilson

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### Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of another degree or diploma or a university or institution of higher learning.

Signed



December 16, 2016

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## **Abstract**

### **What has been? when did it happen? what may happen next?**

This process-based visual arts research examines the 'materiality of time' through a series of site-based interventions in the form of experiential 'real time' systems. Material processes (which may include the site as a material, biological, social or technological connections) are explored as a media for noticing and measuring time. Multiple types of material processes are investigated, as human - made responses to a site and by recording a site's subsequent response to specific interferences over time.

Speculative temporalities (past, present and future) are investigated through methodologies drawn from archaeology, biology and chemistry. This includes types of measuring, surveying, excavating, recording, mutating, isolating and combining of components.

Relationships between human and non-human entities are explored through these disciplines conceptually, where the process and outcome are considered for their affective and social outcomes, rather than with the linear precision of positivist sciences.

Thresholds and turning points, as they build up and collapse, have been examined within the framework of living systems through the processes of accretion and entropy. Liminal conditions of the unknown, the unseen, and the uncertain have been explored through durational occupations of site and through my practice of photography and video. Ecological thresholds such as tidal zones and interior spaces have become sites for temporary installations, including pre-cast measuring posts.

## Introduction

### temporality - systems - materiality

This research project explores time through site explorations and systems based interventions. 'Materiality of Time,' is positioned as an exploration of particular temporalities within the context of site conditions and material processes within specific landscapes.

In my site-specific mode of exploration I find myself always searching for clues and unrevealed histories of human and non-human occupation, within the body of a site. Te Papatapu Road in the Aotea Harbour,<sup>1</sup> Taharoa mining beach and Pig Bay on Motutapu Island are the selected sites for my investigation through lens-based media and through material interventions and performative occupation. These coastal sites are liminal zones, thresholds where the effect of human and non-human events over different timespans can be read in the dynamic conditions of the landscapes.

This gradual and restless search into site temporalities, parallels methodologies from disciplines such as archeology, biology and chemistry. Often this has led to practicing a conceptual approach, a quasi-method, or an 'eccentric form of measure' where experiential and sensory experiments are used to perceive what is otherwise hidden or unseen within the body of a site. Strange, unexpected or lateral findings have been recorded through my practice of photography, video and installation.

This project also responds to the conditions of the Anthropocene, where the acceleration of human effects on the earth's environment, both physical and ecological, is explored through processes of making human-made material transformations. Human actors inform aspects of my process. At times there are participants, who become key responders within the artwork, as impromptu informers, collaborators, helpers and documenters whose activities become a fundamental component of the art work.

The exploration of ancientness, the ancestral, the 'arch fossil' and 'sound fossil' (see Chapter 3) have been inspired by the writings of Quentin Meillassoux and Amelia Barrikin, in a situation where searching for the language of time through material events has influenced my practice and research outcomes. Past, present and future temporal zones are suggested through observational recordings and sculptural processes of acceleration, slowness and duration. These are measured through speculative material experiments that have been set up as systems and then left to take their own course over a period of time. Echoes, drifts, erasure, fragility and accretion are conditions of temporality that inform the material qualities of time measured through these site explorations and installations. Subtle shifts of light, wind, water flows, sounds, and ancient sediments are captured, revealed or transformed.

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes I refer to Aotea Harbour as Aotea Lagoon – this is because of it's lagoon-like qualities. Aotea Harbour is located north of Kawhia on the west coast of the North Island. However the official Aotea Lagoon is located in Porirua Harbour, Kapiti.

The approach to the sites first as an observer, then as a curious or nosy human, then as a meddler are considered methods of research in Chapters one and two. The literature review and survey of knowledge by art practice is woven throughout this exegesis but particularly focused in Chapters three and four. Finally a reflection of my findings and future direction is the focus of Chapter five.

Selected videos of various 'iterations' of site specific works have been made for this research, and the final work. These short videos and the time lapse video of the final work installed in Aotea Harbour can be viewed at the following Vimeo site via this link:

<https://vimeo.com/user60509107>



Figure 1 Aotea Harbour, 2016

## Chapter 1: Place/site/time: why here?

### Triggers:

When I was a child we lived in a street that was built on top of dried mud flats. There was the smell and texture of salty mud, plains of dried cracked mud and the sludgy mud of tidal shifts. When I come across similar coastal estuarine sites, there is a familiarity, a particular feeling that triggers memories of these Nelson mud flats, gumboots sinking and squelching into muddy quick sand as I walked to the boulder bank at low tide, clambering across the huge lumps of concrete along the coastal edge, with my little brother, finding washed up things.

There are times when you find yourself in a place or site that somehow leaks a residual ancientness. Where past, present and future seem to cross-pollinate, and allude to unknown, unseen presence of events. It is in these places of unrest where time is both still and moving, where the ebbs and flows embed traces of pre-human history in sediments and objects that tell of a time pre-thought.

There is something about these sites that provoke feelings of wonder and curiosity, where you are able to sense the material presence formed through natural forces, traversing the times of Gondwanaland 100 million years ago, to the present day transition from the Holocene to the Anthropocene.





Figure 2 Pig Bay, Motutapu Island, 2016

**The following three sites have provided the conditions from which I have been able to explore time through my practice.**

#### **Site 1: Quietly fragile**

Pig Bay, Motutapu Island is located on a zone that navigates across a shore line. There is a beach break, where a small stream cuts a path through the sand to the ocean revealing remnants of neighboring Rangitoto's volcanic history in the layers of rocks and sand. Traces of a Maori midden are exposed through the surface of the sandy grass between zones. The trace of European settlement is revealed in the presence of exotic plantings. Rare birds, dotterels live in hidden nests on the beach and Kiwis are known to live in remnants of native bush near the stream.



Figure 3 Aotea Harbour, Te Papatapu Road, 2016

### Site 2: The Estuarine echo

Te Papatapu Road, Aotea Lagoon is located on the eastern shore of Aotea Harbour, near the Te Papatapu marae. I found this site when driving along the back road from Raglan to Kawhia, while searching for somewhere unknown, a place to be and explore. I was drawn to this small edge of *Macrocarpa* trees along Te Papatapu Road, where the air was completely still, the water silent and glassy and the atmosphere misty. Unusually, the sand is a grainy gold rather than the black metal powder found along the rest of the west coast. This set off my curiosity.



Figure 4 Taharoa Beach black sand mining site, 2016

### Site 3: Erased in isolation

Taharoa Beach, black sand mining site is forty four kilometers south of Kawhia. While driving and looking, without a clear destination, I came across the village of Taharoa and stopped at the local store. I asked if there was a beach nearby and was directed to the Taharoa mining site, where I was told there was a beach, but not to be seen to go on it, as it was owned by NZ Steel Mining Company. The transitional zone between land and sea is a scar, revealing open wound mining. Black sand dunes have been erased, open to the sky. There are coastal plants growing over the dunes, but not totally camouflaging the eradication of the natural forms. There is something uneasy about the aftermath of mining. At the site there is a monument that references a waka. It is facing the ocean with a plaque that reads:

*The Prime Minister, the Rt Hon. N E Kirk, unveiled this symbol of co-operation between New Zealand Steel Limited and the Maori people of Taharoa to mark the official opening of the Taharoa mining operation on November 24, 1973.*



Figure 5 Memorial plaque, Taharoa Beach

*Pig Bay, Te Papatapu Road and Taharoa Beach* have been selected because they are isolated, coastal and atmospheric. They have similar liminal conditions; thresholds located within transitional tidal zones that are the interface between land and sea. The tidal movements and meteorological systems are continually in flux, etching and filling each site at different tempos, continually building up and breaking down. At all three sites, geological forces have left clues of temporality in the material substances of rock, sands and sediments, including fossils of ancient sea creatures that are embedded in the stratas.

Human interference is apparent in the types of flora which can be found and that are missing. Many native species of trees and shrubs have long been felled or burnt off to make way for rye grass and introduced tree and shrub species. Material traces provide a map of human activity over periods of time. These include shells from early Maori middens, remnants of infrastructure such as fence posts, markers, fire pits and walking tracks. Also a range of debris abandoned, including plastic bottles, lids, shoes and in the case of Te Papatapu Road - black rubber tyres. These various site conditions tell of events that have long been, or have just happened or have yet to happen.





Figure 6 Aotea Harbour, 2016



Figure 7 Aotea Harbour, 2016

### Threads of Wonder

The sites are 'enablers' of my search to know what 'I can know' of a given place. In these places, it is possible to 'perceive time' through temporal flows and to follow threads of wonder, where awe overwhelms and sets off an enquiry of speculative processes. These speculations are tested through potential material scenarios, generating the process of art making in the site as well as transferring the conditions of the site to an indoor context.

### Site-conditioned Art Practice

This transferal of site condition relates to artist Robert Smithson's Non-Sites of the late 1960's. Smithson theorizes that *The Non-Site (an indoor earthwork)* "is a three dimensional logical picture that is abstract, yet it represents the actual site [...]. It is by this dimensional metaphor that one site can represent another site which does not resemble it - this is *The Non-Site*."<sup>2</sup>

Smithson's responses are static as abstract representations of site. The materials are set up to be viewed in a gallery situation, in an arranged spatial sequence. Where as in this research, the materials are transferred from the site and set as dynamic open ended processes, where the materials are transformed from one state to another. The audience can experience the processes of time through these experiments set up in the interior locations, or from video recordings made of installations at the site. The temporal and ephemeral conditions of the site are intended to be transmitted as a work of art to an audience.

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<sup>2</sup> Selected Writings by Robert Smithson *A provisional Theory of Non-Sites*. Robert Smithson: Holt Smithson Foundation, accessed November 11, 2014 <http://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/provisional.htm>



Figure 8 *Island Transects*, 2016

## Place/Site: First Interventions

We all walk in mysteries. We are surrounded by an atmosphere about which we still know nothing at all. We do not know what stirs in it and how it is connected with our intelligence. This much is certain, under particular conditions the antennae of our souls are able to reach out beyond their physical limitations.<sup>3</sup>

Goethe (1820)

## Quietly fragile – Island Transects

Site 1, Pig Bay, Motutapu Island, February 2016

There is also something very powerful about fragility. Maybe it's in the tension of sensing potential imbalance, or a sensitivity to external interferences, or not really knowing the fine line between thresholds of build-up and collapse.

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<sup>3</sup> Marina Warner, *The Writing of Stones*, *Cabinet Magazine*, issue 29 (2008), para 9, accessed May 5, 2016  
<http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/29/warner.php>





Figure 9 *Island Transects*, 2016



Figure 10 *Island Transects*, 2016

*'Island Transects'* (2016) was presented as part of the Trans-Tasman Pflab Test, a performative creative practice research laboratory, held at Motutapu Island. The *'Island Transects'* participants were Mick Douglas, Ceri Hann, Amaara Raheem - RMIT, Janine Randerson, Christina Houghton, Lynette Wilson - AUT, Mark Harvey and Suzanne Cowen - University of Auckland.

This was an opportunity to understand site perceptions beyond my own interpretations. I was curious to know how the unseen and unknown would be experienced without previous knowledge of the site and how this could be materialized through site response. The project provided a site-based framework that would allow a participatory response to become a fundamental component of the art work.

Two transect lines were used to examine the relations between human and non-human entities and site conditions. They were made of jute strings pegged in an irregular formation at the beach edge of Pig Bay, intentionally passing through areas of the site where there were clues to possible human and non-human histories.





Figure 11 *Island Transects* 2016, participants Janine Randerson and Amaara Raheem

Participants were asked to investigate conditions of *liminality, burial, exposure, movement, stillness, wetness, dryness, diurnal/nocturnal*, with particular attention to build up and collapse, thresholds and turning points. These were personal observations, perceptions and feelings. Experiential aspects of these conditions were left as material responses or clues, along or near the transect lines. The materials were mostly drawn from the actual site but not limited to the site.

There were two ‘additional variables’:

***Time of the day/night:*** how does experiencing this site at dusk, alter perceptions of the fragility of site? (the participants had passed through and seen the transect lines earlier in the day).

***Silence:*** how did our quietness effect the participants’ perception and responses?

The project took place at dusk’s liminal transition: where the shift of light and temperature is a natural cue for the islands protected bird species to openly gather and promenade before hiding for the night. We descended upon the site in total silence – so as not to disturb or alert birds (in particular Kiwis) of our human presence. In quietness, we engaged with the site, in our individual human ways. As artist Nina Cannell explains “I was always drawn to the empirical nature of chance meetings or happenings out of the experimenter or author's control—the more unintentional findings that were the basis for something else. The theory, so to speak, is less interesting than the moment of finding.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Bomb Magazine accessed October 10, 2016, <http://bombmagazine.org/article/0390714/nina-cannell>, CCS BARD, Bomb



Figure 12 *Island Transects*, 2016, Ceri Hann making stone echoes in the stream with his feet

Our silence, the quietness seemed to induce a hyper awareness, a subliminal discomfort. It was both meditative and corruptible. When I look at the documentation of objects, notes, photos and videos that were made, I can see that not speaking, allowed a type of undisturbed immersion, where the group were able to perceive the site on their own terms.

It was no surprise that the responses varied. One participant, Ceri Hann, managed to corrupt the silence by slowly moving barefoot over the rocks in the stream bed – as he dragged his feet repeatedly, there was a peculiar rhythmic sound of stones scraping collectively through the water. An echo of ancestral objects (stones) creating a kind of sound fossil – captured by Janine Randerson’s visual and sonic recording on a digital tablet. Notes left along the transect told of differing experiences, “Wet ankles floating Jandles”(sic) taped to the transect string above the stream. “Kiwis call when we are not here” was left on the transect line that led to a remnant of native bush. Native Spinach known as *kōkihi* or *Cooks Cabbage* was also taped to the string.



Figure 13 The group of participants before descending onto Pig Bay, 2016



Figure 14 Sorry, 2016

A stick and rock suspended above the stream gently swayed detecting the wind current and the threshold of the rising tide. Plastic debris and cow dung were collected and left beside a transect peg - I read this action as an environmental message, a clean-up of the negative human impact on the site. A secret hidden message had been folded and taped to a transect - I unfolded the word 'Sorry' this apology suggesting a sensitivity to the non-human aspects of the site. Feeling the fragility of the non-human site conditions and bird life, another note read 'I'm leaving now.' Were we intrusive outsiders? or was it an apology for past human interferences at the site?

Artist Pierre Huyghe says "there is something about the condition of encounter which could be the condition of separation."<sup>5</sup> This encounter seemed to have highlighted the separation of human and non-human entities in the area. A discomfort with our own presence, where the beauty, fragility and vulnerability of fauna, flora and site geology seemed confronting and dominated the responses. Dusk and our enforced silence heightened this awareness.

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Huyghe. The Retreat dOCUMENTA (13) youtube accessed April 20, 2015 <http://www.banffcentre.ca/va/>





Figure 15 series of images of *Island Transects*, 2016, Pig Bay, Motutapu Island



Figure 16 Debris, Aotea Harbour, 2016

## The Estuarine echo

Over the course of 6 months I found myself at Te Papatapu Road, Aotea Harbour lagoon site on many occasions.

### Site 2: Te Papatapu Road, Aotea Harbour, May 2016

Philosopher Henri Bergson says of the human sensation of stillness “It is movement that we must accustom ourselves to look upon as simplest and clearest, immobility being only the extreme limit of the slowing down of movement, a limit reached only, perhaps, in thought and never realized in nature.”<sup>6</sup>

Stillness, shrouded my first encounter while standing at the eastern edge of Aotea Harbour, as the estuarine tidal systems silently creep back and forth. The movement was undetectable to my human eye...the tidal traces surprisingly appear as the water gradually retreats and uncovers abandoned black tyres, sand, mud-stone and strata of tidal marks on the coastal grasses along the edge. This estuarine echo of slow and ancient rhythms allude to a weightlessness of time, where stillness and movement are not noticeable immediately.

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<sup>6</sup> Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, T.E Hulme translation, accessed 19 September, 2016  
<http://www.reasoned.org/dir/lit/int-meta.pdf>



Figure 17 Iteration 1, *Silent Drifts*, Aotea Harbour, May 2016

### Revealing the Drifts, May 7th 2016

*“the space traversed, is the only thing, in fact, which is really measurable”<sup>7</sup>*  
(Henri Bergson)

I set two Black balloons onto the water - at first they didn't appear to move, they remained weightless and floating in the same place. As I filmed them I noticed the reflection of a tree gradually entering the image, providing a clue to the balloons actual movement. They were slowly drifting towards the shore. Artist Nina Canell observes “This is very much linked to what we can perceive about time passing, the work is static unless you leave and come back[...] a break is needed to perceive that something has happened.”<sup>8</sup>

I repeated this experiment as the tide retreated, and the balloons gently moved in the direction of the currents, out to sea. They moved across the space at different speeds, separating, uncovering the unseen drift of the waters current. Renegotiating time and speed within the space, and therefore the perception of their movement.

<sup>7</sup> Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (New York: The Mac Millan Company 1910), 116.

<sup>8</sup> Nina Canell, *Mid Sentence*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 2014-2015 accessed October 4, 2015  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NqOhMdlCIRw>



Figure 18 *Iteration 1, Silent Drifts*, 2016, Aotea Harbour





Figure 19 *Iteration 4, Silent Drifts*, 2016 Aotea Harbour

#### June 4th 2016

This time I set free a flotilla of seven black balloons, tied together with string. Moving lightly, slowly then swiftly – one of them broke away, the solo balloon journeyed quicker across the bay into the distance heading right, towards another smaller bay. This movement seemed to indicate tidal systems that shifted direction, under-currents and winds that changed speed. As the water retreated, I repeated this experiment on the shiny wet sand of the estuary. The balloons tied together, were huddled in a pack waiting for gentle breezes and gusts of wind. Eventually they moved and appeared to glide smoothly in unison along the watery sand where the tide had retreated. They stopped, they started as the wind currents drifted over them. They seemed co-joined to their reflections in the wet shiny sand.

Adding a solo balloon, I filmed and waited for them. They huddled still for many minutes then the solo balloon rolled off, independent along the beach and as though its moving presence had been sensed, the cluster of balloons followed. This seemed strangely human.





Figure 20 Iteration 4, *Silent Drifts*, 2016, Aotea Harbour

### August 28<sup>th</sup> 2016

I went to the lagoon site with others, Ross T. Smith and Manaia Sanerivi. We travelled in convoy at dusk, along the gravel road, from Aotea settlement to the site. Our cars full of balloons we'd blown up before we departed from our base. Once there, we all chipped in, tying the balloons together with nylon thread and throwing the flotilla into the water and also across the sand, letting them drift. The balloons move differently this time; they jump over each other like new born lambs tumbling across the estuary. I couldn't quite tell if this was because of the wind currents or was it the way we had tied them together?

### Silent falling

It is cold and misty, the day is setting and it starts to rain. The material of the balloons catch the sound of the silent rain drops at varying speeds, and there is an intense plastic - rain sound that I record at varying distances. The rain, when it falls from the sky, is silent. It is only when the droplets connect with the surfaces of the sand, water and balloons that we are able to hear the tempo of the down-pour, as the gaps and intensities of the rains timing is revealed.



Figure 23 preparing the flotilla, *Iteration 4 Silent Drifts*, 2016



Figure 22 capturing *Iteration 4 Silent Drifts*, 2016



Figure 21 *Iteration 4 Silent Drifts*, 2016



Figure 24 Human made debris, decaying into the tidal zone, Aotea Harbour, 2016

## Chapter 2. The nosy human: ways of knowing/searching/ finding

### *What has been? when did it happen? and what may happen next?*

In speaking about how “traditional hierarchies of interest and meaning give more 'significance' to some things than others Susan Sontag says – “The distinction between true and false experience, true and false consciousness is also denied: in principle, one should desire to pay attention to everything.”<sup>9</sup>

I use the term nosy in the sense of prying or being inquisitive, curious, probing, spying, eavesdropping, intrusive, snooping or being a busy body.<sup>10</sup> Nosiness seems to be a human condition, a quietly inappropriate form of looking, where a boundary or threshold is crossed in an intrusive ‘wanting to know’.

**Inherent nosiness:** In my human way and uninvited, I seem to always find myself searching for clues and unrevealed stories of human and non-human occupation, within the body of a site. I am continuously scanning environments acting as a detective, explorer, or surveyor, observing, noting and documenting clues, traces of previous energies and conditions. This is a restless search to know what has been? when did it happen? and what may happen next?

<sup>9</sup> Susan Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will* (New York, Picador, 1996) 25.

<sup>10</sup> English Oxford Living Dictionaries, ‘Nosy’ accessed December 1, 2016 <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/nosy>





Figure 25 Aotea Harbour, 2016

### What must I do in order to know?

There are processes of searching that I have developed through my art practice that are partially intuitive, quasi scientific and mostly site responsive. I see my research as a process of peeling off information about a place, through finding clues to past events; geological, ancestral, astral and meteorological. The first phase of my research is inspired by a curiosity about the non-human universe recorded in the natural physical structures and systems that are always partially unknown, unseen and unforeseen.

As an amateur or (dilettante) I seem to be intuitively drawing on fields outside my own expertise to make artwork. Artist Mark Dion explains his approach "I work as a sort of archaeologist or biologist, I'm not really claiming to be that person, never the less I am shadowing their methodology [...] I am interested in the figure of the dilettante the amateur."<sup>11</sup> I have loosely employed methodologies used by other disciplines such as archaeology, biology, chemistry and photography in order to explore site and material composites and to make open-ended art works.

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Dion, 'Methodology', Art:21, accessed September 10, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-Nzo0foijl>



Figure 26 Accreted volcanic sediments, Aotea Harbour, 2016

## Tools of Noticing

Walking provides a vital method of noticing. It allows me to observe close up and find things I would not otherwise experience, such as material clues, sounds, silences and meteorological sensations. To reach Aotea lagoon, a site of interest, I made the drive to Kawhia along the gravel back road (Te Papatapu Road). At intervals, I stopped and walked along the coastal edge, gathering information and photographing the conditions, gradually the site was revealed to me. While comparing materials, human debris, sediments, rock formations, layers, sands and muds I noticed an opaque mist, that kept the bay hidden, and I could hear the echo of human voices from across the lagoon, hollow through the mist.

Trans-urbanist and architect Francesco Carreri sees walking as a symbolic form that has enabled man to dwell in the world. He argues that by modifying the sense of the space crossed, walking becomes man's first aesthetic act, penetrating the territories of chaos, constructing an order on which to develop the architecture of situated objects.<sup>12</sup> Carreri continues:

“It is from this vantage point that the territory can be interpreted, memorized and mapped in its becoming” [...] It is this lack of stable reference points that enabled early man, nomadic man, to construct his own map for every occasion, where the geography is in constant change, deformed in time due to the movements of the observer and the perpetual transformation of the territory.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Francesco Carreri, *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice (Land & Scope)*, (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 2002) 20.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid* 42



Figure 27 Aotea Harbour, 2016

While walking I often stop and record with my camera from a stationary position. These fixed moments become co-ordinates, reference points from which I gauge the conditions of the site. Photography and video have been utilized as mediums for documenting these site wanderings and responses over periods of time.

Photographer Jem Southam records open-ended landscape conditions over long periods of time. His photographs are observations of cycles of decay and renewal, recording human and non-human entropic instability. In 1975 Southam, inspired in part by artist Richard Long, made a walk from Berwick upon Tweed to Bristol, that influenced his practice. Describing the walk Southam says “It took two months [...] the idea was to experience the English landscape in a slow way.”<sup>14</sup> Southam describes his strategy;

“I assemble a body of photographic work that is a slow absorption of the site, as well as discussions that I have with those who live nearby, with the examination of maps and other documents. An important principal of my methodology is that I build a body of work which has been directed by the process of exploring the site itself.”<sup>15</sup>

Southam’s images reveal ordinary landscapes in transition, mostly overcast skies give a sense of gloomy stillness where human traces are often shown as discarded or unmaintained objects or forms. Slowly exploring the site itself, gathering information, documenting and returning multiple times, are also aspects of my own wanderings within my practice. However, in contrast to Southam’s strategy, my recorded processes are investigations that inform physical material site explorations and responses of time based interventions at the site.

<sup>14</sup> *Landscape Stories: An Interview with Jem Southam*, Aaron Schuman, *Seesaw*, accessed November 11, 2016  
[http://seesawmagazine.com/southam\\_pages/southam\\_interview.html](http://seesawmagazine.com/southam_pages/southam_interview.html)

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*





Figure 28 Blue-green clay, Te Papatapu Road, Aotea Harbour, 2016

### Quasi Archaeological Methods

At times, it seems appropriate to employ quasi-archaeological methods of looking, such as digging and collecting hidden layers of clay and sand and human-made debris. In his book *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, philosopher Michel Foucault states archaeology is much more willing than the history of ideas to speak of discontinuities, ruptures, gaps, entirely new forms of positivity and sudden redistributions. As he explains:

“[...] and it will find, at the ends of the branches, or at various places in the whole, a burgeoning of 'discoveries' (like that of fossil series), conceptual transformations (like the new definition of the genus), the emergence of new notions (like that of mammals or organism), technical improvements principles for organizing collections, methods of classification and nomenclature.”<sup>16</sup>

In my research the material composites and previous human interferences tell of the actuality and distribution of the site events. I am able to note the locations of the discoveries, make new connections that tell of unknown or unforeseen events and entities and stories of their transformations and movements over time.

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<sup>16</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 164



Figure 29 Kawhia Fish 'n chip shop, 2016

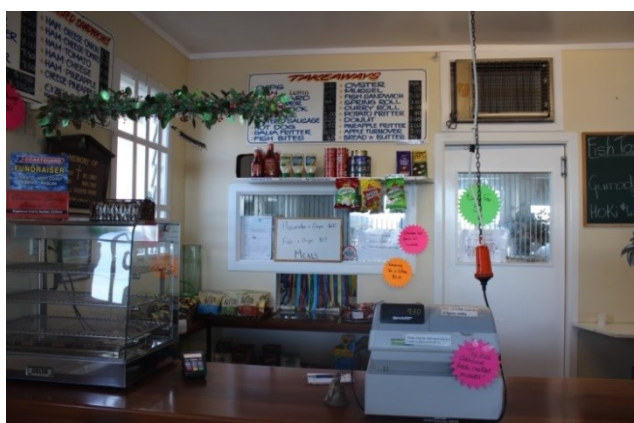


Figure 30 Kawhia Fish 'n chip shop, 2016

### Gathering local knowledge: fish 'n chips

As the research process progressed I found that a conversational method may reveal more about the Aotea lagoon site that had become a catalyst for my enquiry. I was aware that I had been prying as a non-local, outsider, a solo explorer and wondered what could be informally gleaned from the people who lived and worked in Kawhia. An encounter at the Kawhia Fish 'n chip shop provided some clues to where I could go to search for fossils. I chatted with the proprietor about my journey along the lagoon edge, retelling my observations of the mysterious mist, rock formations, middens and the echoing human voices. She responded to my 'enthusiasm' by sharing her local knowledge of fossil sites, and hidden places to explore, and then said to me "you don't choose Kawhia - Kawhia chooses you."<sup>17</sup>

This conversation led me to search for fossils of ammonites along a road side site, at the bottom of a crumbling cliff face, between Kawhia and Oparau. I had read about the bones of a giant penguin found on the foreshore of the Te Waitere inlet at Kawhia by a group of junior naturalists in 2006. It was 28 million years old.

<sup>17</sup> Proprietor, Kawhia Fish'n Chip Shop, May 2016





Figure 31 Ammonite, Kawhia Museum, 2016



Figure 32 Kawhia Museum, 2016

My hope was to find ancestral relics, non-human traces and entities from a time before thought. I found traces of accretion in soft rocks, cored bombs flung from craters, with rinds of lava enclosing previous rock fragments possibly from an earlier eruption. I found one fragment with a small pod or ancient creature encased inside, but no ammonites (yet).

### Kawhia Museum

Later I came across Kawhia Museum. The museum is a tiny wooden colonial building located on the water front and run by a pool of volunteers. It contains a collection of important Tainui artefacts, rocks, Jurassic fossils, nautical histories and relics of European settlement. There is a library of historical archives and local information. A giant ammonite greets you at the entrance. It is a beautifully made fake of a 140 million year old fossil found at a road cutting by Taharoa in 1977. Firstly, I was fooled and then quite disappointed. Once again a conversation with the proprietor helped to make sense of my own perceptions and feelings of this region, in particular Aotea, where ancientness seems to permeate and echo in unchanging rhythms. From this conversation I got a sense that it is like a code that some humans crack and others don't. Surprisingly not everyone notices these echoes of ancient times. The proprietor told of visitors for whom this passes by, and others who could never just leave and forget, but like himself, were drawn back to the timelessness of Kawhia and stayed.



Figure 33 The Meddler, Te Papatapu Road, Aotea Harbour, 2016

### **The Meddler: interventions into the site**

During this time, in a parallel phase with local conversations and site observations I also began to meddle with the site composites, taking materials away and transforming them or adding materials back into the site. We know that in New Zealand human interferences have a shorter time spectrum than many geological events; middens, shifts in flora, infrastructure and debris leave comparatively recent traces at the sites. My own interferences are mostly ephemeral curiosity. This is a type of meddling - an itch to see what lies beneath or embodied within the site composites and how the site will respond. My human meddling with the non-human and geological conditions of the site, led to a process of collecting, filtering and reorganising the sites composites. The sites became multiple, dynamic, secretive, and a context from which to explore 'materiality of time'.



Figure 35 Aotea Harbour, tractor traces, 2016



Figure 34 Fire remnants, Aotea Harbour, 2016

### Processes of collecting

At the Te Papatapu Road site, Aotea Harbour lagoon, I shovelled into buckets quantities of the unusual layer of coarse golden sand. Digging under this sand layer revealed types of sandy clay, a brown coarse clay and an intensely beautiful blue - green clay, similar to the surrounding mud stone formations. I collected samples of these two clays. As I dug holes I noticed a water plateau directly under the clay layers. Later, walking in gumboots in an area of the site revealed a type of quick sand, where my feet/legs were embedded so deep I struggled to pull myself out.

The mud formations were also of interest. They were soft, in a transitional phase from mud to rock, grey- blue and pitted like they had been bombarded by many hail storms. I collected rock-size samples. I photographed other human interferences such as burnt rocks of evening bon fires, tractor marks, abandoned shoes, footprints in mudstone, old black tyres, wooden posts, trees and branches embedded in the sand. I retrieved an old gumboot where oyster shells had grown, lived and died.



Figure 36 Taharoa Beach, black sand mining site, 2016

At **Taharoa Beach** avoiding the surveillance of New Zealand Steel mining company, I collected buckets of the powdery metal black sand from abandoned remnant piles left over from mining. This metal sand seemed to weigh a ton. I lugged the sand in buckets up the sandy bank stopping at intervals as the coastal wind gently whipped up sand veils across the dunes and then I loaded them into my hidden car.

#### **Transformations: what may happen next?**

I began meddling with the collected materials in my studio and the AUT Laboratories'. My enquiry explored transformation of the materials through ideas of temporality and systems that may also occur within the site. Metrological and geological time based thresholds of acceleration, temperature, evaporation, dryness, entropy, accretion, absorption, height, weight and distance have been explored. (see chapter 5)





Figure 37 gumboot with oyster shells, Kawhia, 2016

### Leaving things behind - putting things back

I have put objects back into the Aotea site, these are transformations of the collected sand and clay materials; fabricated as fake rocks and black sand measuring posts made from transforming the sands of Aotea Harbour lagoon and Taharoa Beach. (see chapter 5)

### Contingency: unknowability: Not being able to know

There is something unknowable and uncontrollable that is simply beyond the human capacity to comprehend. Whether this is a characteristic or an animal trait, or an idea about the wild, wildness, or the wilderness. This essence was important to define, maintain as something that exists but is elusive that occurs regardless of human presence or intervention.<sup>18</sup>

Artist Pierre Huyghe says that his work is primarily about searching for "The vitality in a given body and in order to do so you have to accept the uncertain, the unreason, the unknown."<sup>19</sup> Within the sites there are continuous shifts, junctures, ruptures and layers that cannot be known by my human self at every point in time, and there is a fundamental and underlying unknowability, so that anything might happen, even nothing at all.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Reed & Nina Lister Editors. *Projective Ecologies*, (Harvard Graduate School of Design 2014)

<sup>19</sup> Pierre Huyghe. -The Retreat dOCUMENTA (13) you tube accessed 20.04.2015 <http://www.banffcentre.ca/va/>

<sup>20</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2009), 63.



Figure 38 Aotea Harbour, 2016

In my practice uncertainty drives my explorations, where the unknown, the unforeseen and chance are contingencies that are transferred from site to the processes in my artwork. Philosopher Quentin Meillassoux believes there is only one thing that is absolutely necessary: that the laws of nature are contingent.<sup>21</sup> It is these states of open-ended flows and fluxes, that make me constantly question what it is, that can be known.

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<sup>21</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2009) viii.



Figure 39 Iteration 1, *Silent Drifts*, Aotea Harbour, 2016

### Chapter 3. Non- Linear Temporality

#### *What has been? when did it happen? and what may happen next?*

Art can help us escape from linear conceptions of time and to resist conceptions of time as relentless flow oriented only towards the future [...] art is valued for potential to create eddies in the river of time, to generate pockets of stillness sound or silence, which it is possible to return to lost moments or recuperate lost structures to redraw fading memories and make alternative chronologies.<sup>22</sup> (Amelia Barikin 2015)

Embodied within the material language of the sites selected for this research, are traces of natural dynamic forces that record temporal shifts that have been formed through both linear (closed) and non-linear (open ended) temporal processes. Through my practice I have explored these material dynamic conditions, as media for measuring time. Site materials are transformed through a combination of natural and human-made processes giving 'form' to various temporalities, to enable various readings of timespans. This opens up possibilities of in situ non-linear explorations of time and systems, rather than searching for linear chronologies. This chapter weaves philosophical fragments on temporality to situate my project; from Henri Bergson to Michael Fried to the speculative realist thought of Amelia Barikin and Quentin Meillassoux.

<sup>22</sup> Amelia Barikin. 'Sound Fossils and Arche - Fossils: Towards a Mineral Ontology of Contemporary Art', accessed May 20, 2016 [https://soundcloud.com/liquid\\_architecture/amelia-barikin](https://soundcloud.com/liquid_architecture/amelia-barikin)



## Eccentric forms of affective measurement

“pure duration might well be nothing but a succession of qualitative changes, which melt into and permeate one another, without precise out lines, without any tendency to externalize themselves in relation to one another, without any affiliation with number [...]”.<sup>23</sup>

(Henri Bergson, 1889)

Traditional forms of measure gauge the precise quantity or size or number of something. In this research, lateral forms of measure have been employed to reveal thresholds of temporality. These are often quasi-scientific, partially interpretative forms of measure – developed to gauge random unpredictable, unseen events that may not even have happened yet. To say one has ‘got the measure of something’ can often mean they have worked something out rather than a literal quantifiable total of units.

In my practice I have used eccentric forms of temporal and physical measure, such as balloons in *Silent Drifts* (2016) to indicate tidal flows and shifting wind currents, where balloons are indicators or revealers of an instant direction change, quickness, slowness and distance. Experiential aspects of site are measured in terms of human perception in the project *Island Transects* (2016) feeling, experiencing, perceiving, sensing are measured at locations along a transect (a scientific mode of measure) in an open-ended participatory performance (see Chapter 5).

Entropic processes are ‘set up’ to measure duration of potential decay of the black sand measuring posts, when embedded in the Aotea lagoon site, as I will discuss further in Chapter five. These posts are also measuring the height of tidal flows over time. Thresholds of acceleration, heat, entropy have also been tested in this research where I produce new materials and also accelerate processes that perhaps inform a way to survive a post-human future.

## Anthropocene/ Present

I realize I have deep fear of earth’s current transition from the stability of the Holocene, to the uncertainty of the Anthropocene, where late modernity has become ‘a peculiar form of acceleration.’<sup>24</sup> This uncontrollable entropic state of human induced ecological decline was anticipated in the artwork of Robert Smithson where thresholds are irreversible. The non-human world is irreversibly changed by humans, where new geological time frames have been set in motion, perhaps there is an unseen resilience, in effect change is built into systems; they are characterized in part by uncertainty and dynamism.<sup>25</sup> It is said that in a failed system new systems have space to grow<sup>26</sup> through the use of existing material systems, in different ways.

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<sup>23</sup> Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910), 74.

<sup>24</sup> Pamela Lee, *Chronophobia: On Art and Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006), 45.

<sup>25</sup> Chris Reed and Marie Nina Lister, *Projective Ecologies*, 42.



Figure 40 Te Papatapu Road, Aotea Harbour, 2016

“To fall in and out of time and lose one’s bearings in the process: this would seem to be one of the great tropes of literary modernism, that the ever rushing pace of contemporary life had out stripped one’s attempts to make sense of the present.”<sup>27</sup>

(Pamela Lee, 2006)

The datum from which we can measure temporal events of past and future, is set in the present. This project proposes that no event can be read as complete. All histories are open to transformation and revision through the discovery of new information, new methodologies, new analysis and socio-political perceptions set in the present time. The contemporaneity of several transformations does not mean their exact chronological coincidence: each transformation may have its own particular index of temporal 'viscosity.'<sup>28</sup> In my research practice, I am transforming site materials through processes that emulate conditions that they may have endured at an earlier time, or could occur to them in the future. As Bergson reflects, “The present contains nothing more than the past and what is found in the effect was already in the cause.”<sup>29</sup> In the case of this research, present time is when the artwork and processes are explored developed, constructed, recorded and viewed.

<sup>26</sup> Nina Cannell, CSS Bard Interview with Paul O Neil and students, 2016, accessed October 14, 2016

<sup>27</sup> Pamela Lee, *Chronophobia: On Art and Time in the Art of the 1960s*, xi.

<sup>28</sup> Foucault. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 175<sup>28</sup> Henri Bergson, *The Creative Evolution* (New York: Dover Publications, 1998), 14.

<sup>29</sup> Henri Bergson, *The Creative Evolution* (New York: Dover Publications, 1998), 14.

The processes of the art works are open ended and the viewer may experience the work as a 'moment in motion' where the movement or transformation may or may not be immediately detectable in the present time, or time of viewing. Often the movements within the work are quite unpredictable and unexpected, where nothing is ever the same each time it is seen, the idea is that energy is made and used, each iteration different.

Modernist art critic Michael Fried argued against the prevalent concern for temporality in 1960's art his critical essay *Art and Object hood* 1967. Fried criticized the open-ended duration of the minimalist object and labelled its violation of medium as theatrical.<sup>30</sup> Fried objected to ideas of duration and audiences participating or waiting for processes to happen in the work. Fried described the experience as an "Endlessness, being able to go on and on, even having to go on and on, as central to the concept."<sup>31</sup> Seeming to decry the dynamism of these process based artworks, Fried wrote of the preferable experience of viewing still works such as painting and sculpture.

"It is this continuous and entire presentness, amounting, as it were, to the perpetual creation of itself, that one experiences as a kind of instantaneousness: as though if only one were infinitely more acute, a single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it. Presentness is Grace."<sup>32</sup>

Fried sees a grace in stillness, in the instant moment where the viewer experiences exactly the same iteration each time it's viewed. Fried's view has had many critical and creative challenges as documented in art historian Pamela Lee's *Chronophobia* (2006) who traces the creative concern for time to the 1960s when it became paramount. Robert Smithson published a powerful and critical response at the time, lambasting Fried's comments on the theatricality of temporality identifying Fried's thesis as a temporal problem.<sup>33</sup> Smithson taunted that "What Fried fears most is the consciousness of what he is doing, namely being himself, theatrical. He dreads distance because that would force him to become aware of the role he is playing."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Michael Fried, *Art and Object hood*, VII accessed September 6 <http://atc.berkeley.edu/201/readings/FriedObjcthd.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>33</sup> Lee, 48.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 49.



Figure 41 Aotea Harbour, 2016

## Ancestral Time

In speculative realist philosopher Quentin Meillassoux's essay 'After Finitude' (2006) the ancestral is described as "any reality anterior to the emergence of the human species - or even anterior to every recognized form of life on earth."<sup>35</sup> Therefore in an ancestral context 'reality' is a material event that may include light, sound and any formations within the cosmos and planet earth at a time before human thought. Meillassoux also coined the term 'arche fossil' as a remanent of the universe confirmed by science as existing before the beginnings of terrestrial life, everything before life on earth.<sup>36</sup> For Meillassoux the term of the arche fossil is not limited to earth bound matter, it can include any event or ancestral statement prior to human thought. Essentially a world constituted before we start even thinking about it."<sup>37</sup> According to Meillassoux; "notions of distance and ancientness are both vague, since no one can settle for once and for all, in the context of this argument, where the proximate or the recent end, and where 'the distant' or 'the ancestral' begin."<sup>38</sup>

The notion of the arche fossil resonates with the physical fossils in the Aotea and Kawhia area. These reveal traces of life from the Oligocene epoch, 24-40 million years ago, made up of mostly shells and sea creatures. Pumice and rock formations tell of the volcanic eruptions of Lake Taupo. The black sand beaches and dunes are results of the many volcanos that used to be nearby during Jurassic times. This landscape and site is a hard drive of paleontological information revealing a time before human thought.

<sup>35</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2009), 19.

<sup>36</sup> Barikin, Amelia. *Arch Fossils and Future Fossils: The Speculative Paleontology of Julien Charriere* (Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2014), 19.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>38</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, 19.

## Sound Fossils

In 2015 art historian Amelia Barikin presented the lecture 'Towards a Mineral Ontology of Contemporary Art' on sound fossils and arche fossils at the Gertrude Contemporary Gallery, Melbourne, drawing on Meillassoux's thoughts on Ancestral time. The transcription of the audio of this talk has inspired and expanded my exploration of ideas of fossils and time within my research and practice. Barikin argued that "[...] sound is actually imprinted into the environments around us, so that earth is an acoustic witness to history,"<sup>39</sup> in reference to the following events in the 1960s.

At Bell Lab, New Jersey, 1964, astronomers Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson were studying radio emissions of the Milky Way, when they picked up strange and unexpected background 'snow' on Bell Labs large horn antennae. This residual noise was 100 times more intense than they had expected, was evenly spread over the sky and was present day and night. Convinced that the apparatus was faulty they took it apart and cleaned it out but the interference remained. Both concluded the noise was outside our own Galaxy, but they were not sure from where.<sup>40</sup>

At Princeton University physicist Robert Dickie and colleagues theorized if the Big Bang had occurred then there should be traces of low level radiation dispersed and audible throughout the universe. But before he could test out this hypotheses he was contacted by Penzias and Wilson and realized and that they had stumbled across the sound as the creation of time or Big Bang. This 13.8 billion year old sound fossil was subsequently identified as cosmic microwave background noise. Penzias and Wilson won the Nobel Prize in 1978.<sup>41</sup>

Barikin describes this sound is an ancestral trace; "The trace of time outside thought manifested in the present. It does not exist in the past or ancestral time, and is not tied to a moment before consciousness, it is apprehended as a material trace of the ancestral in the present."<sup>42</sup> This sense of the material trace of the ancestral time is something that I also allude to in my installation practice, mostly through materiality. In the next chapter I will focus in more detail on artists' projects that are concerned with process, temporality, the ancestral and the arche fossil.

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<sup>39</sup> Barikin, accessed May 20, 2016 [https://soundcloud.com/liquid\\_architecture/amelia-barikin](https://soundcloud.com/liquid_architecture/amelia-barikin)

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>41</sup> A P S Physics accessed September 15, 2016  
<https://www.aps.org/programs/outreach/history/historicsites/penziaswilson.cfm>

<sup>42</sup> Barikin, accessed May 20, 2016 [https://soundcloud.com/liquid\\_architecture/amelia-barikin](https://soundcloud.com/liquid_architecture/amelia-barikin)

## Chapter 4. Systems in Contemporary Art Practice

### 1960's processed based art

This section explores my practice in relation to systems in contemporary art practice, with a discussion of the process-based art in the 1960s in America, that emerged at the same time as Systems theory. Time-based systems in art provided a freedom from the fixed object, where the artwork became unpredictable and open-ended. Jack Burham, a prominent art writer in the 1960s, acknowledges the influence of Von Bertalanffy's Systems Theory for artists, stating, "the movement away from art objects has been precipitated by concerns within natural and manmade systems, processes, ecological relationships and the philosophical - linguistic involvement of Conceptual Art."<sup>43</sup>

All of these interests deal with art that is transactional; they deal with underlying structures of communication or energy exchange instead of abstract appearances. Systems based art promotes the phenomenal experience of viewing art as material and embodied, as contingent and site determined.<sup>44</sup>

A concern with time, independence and exchange were fundamental to the culture of the 1960's and were reflected in the work of artists such as Hans Haacke, David Medalla and Robert Smithson. Hans Haacke stated the following of his conceptual systems of the 1970s; "such an approach is concerned with the operational structure of organizations, in which the transfer of information energy and /or material occurs. Systems can be physical, biological, social; they can be man-made naturally existing or a combination of any of the above."<sup>45</sup>

Time, movement and independent processes are important exploratory threads in my practice. In particular setting up dynamic processes and then letting them take their course. In my work, I am searching for various thresholds between fixed and open ended outcomes, where the art work leads the viewer through a process that may incur unforeseen or unknown physical outcomes, rather than a fixed aesthetic. It is this freedom of transfer between the material components, where processes involving heat, water and air allow visible exchange between substances and also between the human (artist/viewer) and non-human (site materials).

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<sup>43</sup> Pamela Lee, *Chronophobia: On Art and Time in the Art of the 1960s*, 62.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p 95.

<sup>45</sup> Hans Haacke, Howard Gallery New York 1969 accessed August 8, 2016, <http://www.macba.cat/en/condensation-cube-1523>



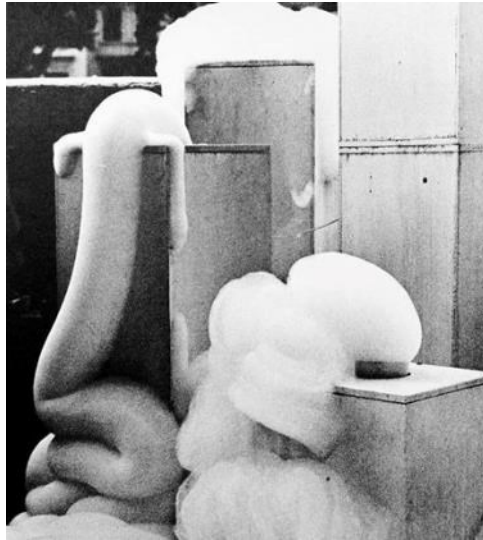


Figure 42 David Medella, *Cloud Canyons no 3, An Ensemble of Bubble Machines*, 1961

For instance David Medella's *Cloud Canyons no 3, An Ensemble of Bubble Machines* (1961), is an art work where the viewer is led through a cycle, where continual lengths of white bubbly foam spill out of tall transparent tubes set in an arrangement of wooden boxes. Soapy liquid at the bottom of the tubes is turned into foam by compressors concealed inside the wooden portions of the sculpture. The foam is projected upwards through the tubing and forms cloud-like clusters that slowly slide down the exterior of the tube, and eventually rejoin the bath of soapy liquid.<sup>46</sup> I am interested in the cycle of this process and the way the material disappears and transforms back into itself again. The tangible form slowly becomes nothing and new forms are born from the same liquid base into where they disappeared. No two iterations are the same.

I have found myself drawn to the art work by Hans Haacke, *Bowery Seeds* (1970). Because it produces a strange visual disconnect at first, prompting readings of nature/culture confrontation.



Figure 43 Hans Haacke, *Bowery Seeds*, 1970

<sup>46</sup> The Tate accessed September 10, 2016 <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/medalla-cloud-canyons-no-3-an-ensemble-of-bubble-machines-auto-creative-sculptures-t12201/text-summary>

When Haacke placed a pile of soil on the rooftop of his studio in the Bowery New York he had no fixed notion as to what would happen next. In Haacke's own words he had "set up a stage or provided some but not whole [...] and then left things to chance."<sup>47</sup> The placement of the soil facilitated events beyond his control, where over time air borne seeds germinated and grew on the pile of soil. Manifesting as an open-ended system, site-specific and deliberately highlighting the unpredictability of natural occurrences as they happen over time.

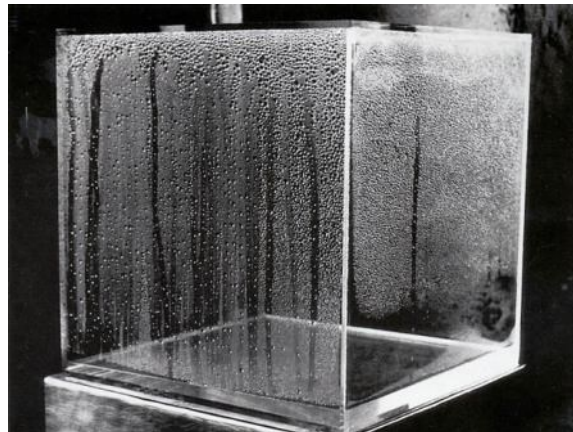


Figure 44 Hans Haacke, *Condensation Cube*, 1962

Prior to this, Haacke's real-time system *Condensation Cube* (1962), seemed comparatively hard, dumb and empty - a minimalist cube, that was quite literally vacuous."<sup>48</sup> It was constructed out of clear acrylic, lined with a shallow base of water that evaporated inside the cube causing gradual condensation to collect on the walls of the cube and droplets to slowly slide downwards.<sup>49</sup> Haacke explained, "The conditions are comparable to a living organism which reacts in a flexible manner to it's surroundings. The image of condensation cannot be precisely predicted. It is changing freely, bound only by statistical limits, I like this freedom."<sup>50</sup> However, when I compare this to Haacke's *Bowery Seeds* the condensation system of the cube seems quite controlled, not so open ended, relying on human adjustment of the interior site temperature and water.

Similarly, in my own practice, I have explored controlled and uncontrolled systems through organic-living processes in earlier works '*For the time being*' 2015 (indoor) and '*Up Rise*' 2016 (outdoor) as part of a curated group show held at a domestic house, called "A Revolution has to Start Somewhere." The materiality of the works, is made up of commercially grown grass, soil and water that are set up in selected environments and then left to take their course.

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with *SLOUGHT*, Hans Haacke, accessed October 17, 2016  
[https://slought.org/resources/hans\\_haacke\\_on\\_site\\_specificity](https://slought.org/resources/hans_haacke_on_site_specificity)

<sup>48</sup> Lee, *Chronophobia: On Art and Time in the Art of 1960's*, 77.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>50</sup> MACBA \Hans Haacke. New York, October 1965, accessed October 10, 2016  
<http://www.macba.cat/en/condensation-cube-1523>



Figure 45 Lynette Wilson, *Up Rise*, 2016, 6 months after installation, showing natural succession.

With no human maintenance '*For the time being*' eventually died off. '*Up Rise*' where the replacement grass is embedded in an established domestic lawn, relied on the existing soils and meteorological processes. Interestingly the new grass eventually changes colour, to match the original surrounding grass. This could be due to soil minerals. There are parts where the grass had died off, like Haacke's *Bowery Seeds* - air borne seeds naturally settled in, gradually replacing the commercial species with ground cover and weeds.

An extension of this practice is my Masters research, *Island Transects* (2016) Motutapu; This seemed to be set up as a free open-ended interactive art project, where the humans could respond to the transects on their own terms. However in hindsight, I had controlled these responses more than I realized. I had selected the site, the criteria for exploration, a time of day that I knew was transitional, enforced a code of silence, and controlled where the transect lines were pegged, so that the participants might find things I wanted them to find. What I couldn't control, was the participants' interpretations of all I had set out, where they perceived unknown, unseen and unforeseen in individual ways.

However my project, at Aotea Harbour: *Silent Drifts* (2016) was genuinely unpredictable. There were various iterations of black balloons on water and black balloons on land, where a group of the balloons were tied together and two were left loose. Balloons were selected because of their weightlessness, curved form and colour black, which connected visually with the sites materials and is quietly mournful.

Once set in place, I had no control over their movement, the balloons became explorers, revealers of energies I could not see or measure, giving visibility to invisible forces. They glided freely, floating, rolling and hopping in the directions of the currents, over the water and sand carried by the currents of wind and water at varying speeds in unpredictable directions.

Site as a material for art making is a continual thread within my practice. I have explored connections to Robert Smithson's use of site as a material from which he explores temporality, thresholds, motion and transition.



Figure 46 Robert Smithson, *Partially Buried Wood Shed*, 1970, sequential images showing decay over time

### Smithson's ephemerality

Smithson's project, partially buried woodshed (1970), built at Kent State University, Ohio, draws on site as a material catalyst for setting off entropic material processes. Consisting of an old woodshed partially buried on one side beneath twenty truckloads of earth.<sup>51</sup> Smithson intended the shed to gradually break down under the weight of the earth and that vegetation to grow over the remains until it existed no more, "once set, the process was irreversible as a condition that's moving towards a gradual equilibrium."<sup>52</sup>

In this work, Smithson's idea implicates the site as a double agent, where it is both the catalyst for the slow entropic breakdown of the woodshed and then subsequently the facilitator of accretion where the landscape gradually encased the remains of the woodshed, building up layers over a period of time. The duration of this slow breaking down and building up is unknown, and the processes not immediately noticeable.

The material of the shed is potentially absorbed by the sites soil composites and becomes part of the natural systems. Giving back to the land that metaphorically grew the trees that provided the wood to build the shed. This ephemeral material transformation has survived as a hidden, unnoticeable trace that tells the story of this event, however it has also now become a new material substance for another time in the future.

<sup>51</sup> Jennifer Mundy. *Lost Art: Robert Smithson*, accessed May 20, 2015

<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/gallery-lost-art-robert-smithson>

<sup>52</sup> *Entropy made Visible*, interview with Alison Sky, accessed June 14, 2016

<https://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/entropy.htm>

## Julien Charrière: future temporalities

Aspects of contemporary artist Julien Charrière's practice have influenced my own thinking about temporality and site in art practice. Amelia Barrikin describes Charrière's practices as a kind of "speculative paleontology" an approach that departs from an archaeological frame to question the increasing relevance of both non-living forms and non-human time scales, to the field of contemporary art. Where he explores ideas of fossils of future time.<sup>53</sup> In a similar mode to Smithson, Charrière often travels to various sites and then responds to the site through transforming or isolating the site materials to make art works.

*"If you mined my stone, you could rebuild the technology"*<sup>54</sup>

*Metamorphism*, 2016 was conceived after a visit to China, where Charrière saw mineral displacement from massive mining projects. Charrière, concerned with the idea of "taking stuff out of the ground without putting back,"<sup>55</sup> made large fragments of rock by melting down the internal elements from various technological devices such as main boards, hard drives, CPUs, RAMs with molten larva, turning them into topological fragments from the future. The idea is to return them to their geological origins (metaphorically) and provide a reflection of the ecological repercussions of the economic basis of our digital world.<sup>56</sup> Charrière likens the process to a data transfer. "The stone has the same amount of information, only now it's stored in an abstract way, like a sort of geo-data."<sup>57</sup>

Observations of humans effect on the global environmental, are underlying themes in both Smithson and Charrière's projects, each responding to the worldly concerns of their era. Both portray a type of apocalyptic entropic end, where the materiality of the planet somehow lives beyond all of this, in a metamorphosed or transformed state.

Charrière departs from his narrative of putting back, by presenting the metamorphosed rocks as museological - archaeological pieces in display cabinets, like moon rocks or meteorites. He has displayed this new material mineral form as type of speculative future fossil, containing a hidden language of a previous time.

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<sup>53</sup> Amelia Barrikin, *Arch Fossils and Future Fossils: The Speculative Paleontology of Julian Charrière*. (Mousse Publishing, Milan 2014) 19.

<sup>54</sup> *Art News*, Robin Scher, accessed November 15, 2016

<http://www.artnews.com/2016/03/04/what-sustains-this-digital-world-julian-charriere-on-his-man-made-rocks-at-the-armory-show/>

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*





Figure 47 Julien Charrière, *Metamorphism*, 2016



Figure 48 Julien Charrière, *Metamorphism*, 2016

## The secret language of time

*The Drusy Vein* (2014) by artists Melissa Dubbin and Aaron S. Davidson draws on the ideas of the hidden language of stone, that may be accreted and embedded in the material presence of their forms. The artists made an iterative portrait of a gemologist using the materials they engage with their work: The voice of Karen L. Davidson speaking about four stones was recorded by these very stones on four electroplated master discs. Four pendants were then designed, using the diamond, ruby, sapphire and emerald styli, before being worn by four persons (a curator, a writer, an artist and a psychoanalyst), who in turn wrote four texts relating their respective experiences while being exposed to these objects<sup>58</sup> Druse refers to the sparkling of crystals above a mineral vein, that is accessible on the surface.

Reflecting on *The Drusy Vein Project* Amelia Barikin asks how to take seriously the possibility of non-human knowledge – and the example she is referring to is knowledge from the stones. “How does this knowledge be heard how can these stones speak how does this language be consecrated?”<sup>59</sup>

Barikin questions possibilities of reading or hearing ancestral knowledge within the stones, as arche fossils where accreted histories of the world are stored in the material forms, similarly Charrière refers to geo data. The idea that events of time are contained in a language deeply embedded in the layers of rock or stone is expressed by Volaine Sautter, a geologist and one of the four contributors to the Drusy project who wrote;

Expelled by volcanic activity from under the earth’s crust towards the surface of the world, within the diamond is encapsulated in the infinitely small, hides the whole history of the deep earth the primitive earth, it’s physiology it suffices that we know how to shrink down our thought, how to read this miniscule mineral alphabet, and to us the diamond will speak the language of the depths, the language of secrecy, the world of silence. It allows us to penetrate the impenetrable to make this impossible journey, the journey to the centre of the earth. Mineral alphabet could be read. Although silent, this mineral alphabet is a fossil that can speak.<sup>60</sup>

Sutters discussion of layers or accreted histories that may be stored in geological or mineral forms resonates with my own search. I find I am searching for various scales of time through reading the layers of rocks and sediments. From miniscule particles of sand, to large geological formations, maybe I am also searching for the mineral alphabet that possibly tells of huge ancient events. *The Drusy Vein Project* inspires my interest in

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<sup>58</sup> *A Drusy Vein*, Dubbin and Davidson accessed June 5, 2016 <http://www.dubbin-davidson.com/a-drusy-vein>

<sup>59</sup> Barikin accessed May 20, 2016, [https://soundcloud.com/liquid\\_architecture/amelia-barikin](https://soundcloud.com/liquid_architecture/amelia-barikin)

<sup>60</sup> Volaine Sautter, *A Drusy Vein*, Dubbin and Davidson accessed June 5, 2016 <http://www.dubbin-davidson.com/a-drusy-vein>

the idea of actually hearing stones and geological remnants through alternative mediums. But how do I do this and know what I am hearing is a language? Maybe it could be like putting a sea shell to my ear...Although Dubbin and Davidson's project physically elicits a sound from the minerals through types of recordings, it is really a kind of hopeful act. What can they hope? We don't really know what the sounds are or if they are communications that tell us anything about the history of each stone. I see it as a beautiful poetic gesture, that opens up other ideas of exploration into communication with non-human objects from pre-human time, through Art.

Exploring temporal processes of accretion and entropy and duration have been outlined in the next chapter of my research. This has been done through transforming the collected site materials of sand (from two sites) and clay. Bisque firing the sands with catalysts and re-introducing the work back into the site, in the form of measuring posts and stones. These are re-introduced into the site and left to the tidal processes, where the forms may breakdown over time.



Figure 49 Blue – green clay, Aotea sand and Taharoa sand, 2016

## Chapter 5. Reflection on practice: catalysts/ acceleration/ thresholds/slowness

Back in my studio, surrounded with buckets filled with black sand, golden sand and blue-green clay found at the sites. The colours and textures of the sands and clays speak of events in time, placement and mineral composites; offering clues to their ancient origins and the geological and meteorological shifts that have formed them. The pale-blue calcareous sandstone can be traced almost continuously from Waikato Heads to Aotea Harbour.<sup>61</sup>

I was interested in the idea of distorting ‘material time’ by transforming the sand back to its original post molten state of rock. This future form, resembling what it may have been millions of years ago, before it was slowly ground to tiny particles of sand by the motion of the ocean. I began exploring ideas of transformation and acceleration through types of material processes. First heating the materials, this connected my findings of the volcanic bombs of past ancestral events and volcanic black sands with the future accelerating temperatures of the Anthropocene.

### Glass Lab visit

I wondered what would happen if I heat the sands, will they melt into glass? Become a solid form? What are they made up of? To know more, I made a visit to the Glass Blowing Lab in Hamilton, I questioned Steve Newcombe who is an expert glass equipment maker. I was lucky Steve had knowledge of the Kawhia and Aotea sands. He advised the golden sand is mostly made up of crushed shells and the black sand, a titanomagnetite (iron composite). I would need to add a catalyst compound as an accelerant to make the sand transform at lower temperatures and bake them in an oven.

<sup>61</sup> KASM accessed November 10, 2016, <http://kasm.org.nz/seabed-mining/west-coast-ironsands/detailed-inventory/>

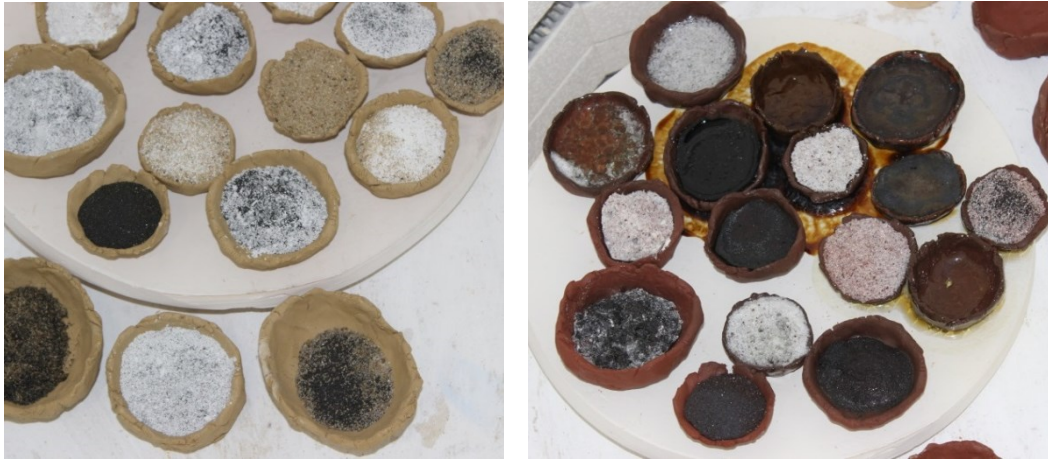


Figure 50 Unbaked and baked crucibles with sand mixtures, 2016

### Acceleration: my Chronophobic impulse

With the help of Artist Harriet Stockman, an expert maker through material processes and Kiln firing, I made up a number of clay crucibles and mixed the sands with various combinations and ratios of accelerants. The accelerants were a soda ash, frit and molochite. These were fired at 1060 degrees Celsius, the outcomes varied broadly.

(See Figure 50) The mixture melted the black sand to black glass, similar to a glaze composite and the golden sand turned pink, the colour of baked shells. Two of the black sand mixtures resembled the texture of a volcanic bomb that I had recovered from the fossil site. I then made more tests at a bisque firing temperature of 960 degrees Celsius. The outcomes were textured and rock-like.

This informed my idea of reproducing actual stones from the site. I made moulds and casts of three stones gathered from the sites. I then produced a series of fake reproductions, made from the ancient sands and accelerant mixtures that were bisque fired. These stones are textured and vary in colour. (see Figure 51)

Hidden within my new fake stones are ancestral materials that speak of time before human thought. The grains of sand potentially reveal a secret language that tell of ancient events of a particular time and place. As art-works the stones have this double ontology of materiality [...] where the material itself operates beyond and outside its deployment in an art context. It does something more than the art- work is asking it to do.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Barikin, accessed May 20, 2016, [https://soundcloud.com/liquid\\_architecture/amelia-barikin](https://soundcloud.com/liquid_architecture/amelia-barikin)





Figure 52 Cast stones made of sand grouped with the original real stones, 2016

Aesthetically my human-made stones are no more distinctive than the real stones, presented together, they confuse the viewer – are they real or fake? Their material story is now a human induced temporal distortion. Roger Calloise says real stone represents an obvious achievement, yet one arrived at without invention, skill, industry or anything else that would make it a work on the human sense of the word, much less a work of art.<sup>63</sup> Calloise and Barikin, both emphasize the subdued presence of time emanating from within a solid stone, this energy is referred to as the ‘stoniness of the stone.’<sup>64</sup> I wondered if this presence remains in the ground-down composite material of sand? I tried cutting the ends of my fake stones with an electric cutting tool. The heat and ancient volcanic metal ore sent off sparks of energy, the heat causing the materials to soften and glisten. I returned a selection of the fake stones to the Aotea site. These were captured in plastic netting and tied with a cord to a metal bar embedded in the sand. This allowed the stones to move with the tidal drifts, the sand slowly reshaped the stones over a period of time. I then retrieved them after 30 days (as seen in final work).

<sup>63</sup> Roger Calloise *The Writing of Stones* (University Press, Virginia, USA, 1985) 2.

<sup>64</sup> Barikin accessed May 20, 2016, [https://soundcloud.com/liquid\\_architecture/amelia-barikin](https://soundcloud.com/liquid_architecture/amelia-barikin)

CUP - 20 grams			Cone 1		outcome
NO	Sand Type/additive	weight	Temperature	Time	
✓1	Black 10g Frit 5g molt 5g	20g	Kilne pro	11.15.	Temperature. ashens coming together. Solid.
✓2	Black 5g Aotea 15g	20g	Cone 1	Dropped 11.54	Heatwork loose A-K-Black.
✓3	Aotea Sand 10g Soda ash 10g	20g	"	"	Glass - (Bake) White edges.
✓4	Aotea 10g Black 10g Frit 5g molt 5g	30g	"	"	matt - gritty pink/white/black
✓5	Aotea sand 5g Frit 15g	20g	"	"	Solid - melted/ Bubbly - pinkish
* ✓6	Pure Black 20grams	20gr	"	"	matt Black-Red - slightly sparkly men
* 7	Aotea Sand 20g	20gr	"	"	Pink color.
✓8	15g Black 5g soda ash	20gr	"	"	molten - Black & Copper stuck to sides. Dull
✓9	15 grams Aotea Sand 5gms Soda Ash	20g	"	"	solid white, pink sides. Glossy.
✓10	15 grams Black 5 grams Frit	20g	"	"	shiny glittery mostly Black - stuck to side.
✓11	Pure Black 10g soda Ash 10g	20g	"	"	molten Black/Brown glossy edges (simulate)
✓12	Pure Black 5g Frit 15g	20g	"	"	Glossy Black surge - glass melted -
✓13	Pure Black 5g soda Ash 15g	20g	"	"	White - Pink crystalline solid
✓14	Aotea 10g molt 5g Frit 5g		"	"	melted
✓15	Aotea 5g Soda Ash 15g	20g	"	"	
✓16	Aotea 10g Black sand 10g	20g	"	"	glossy edges - Brown/black matt.
✓17	Black sand 10g Frit 10g	20g	"	"	Glass Edge
✓18	Aotea 15g Frit 5g	20g	"	"	Solid white.
19					
20					
✓22	Black - 15g Aotea 5g	20	"	"	solid Black Aotea Pink loose.

Composite test ratio's and outcomes.

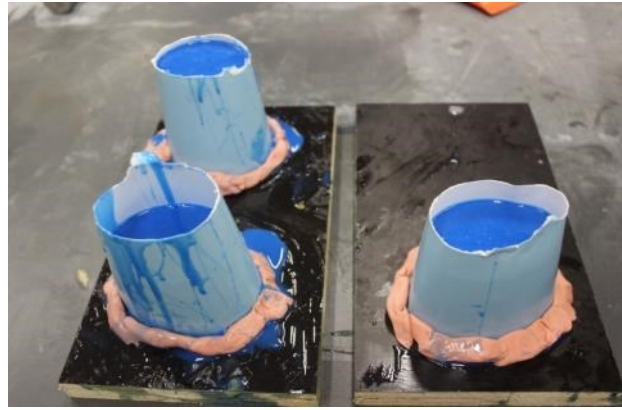


Figure 53 series of images showing the process of making fake stones from sand, 2016





Figure 54 Series of 3 images showing *Catch of Stones* installed at Aotea site, October 2016

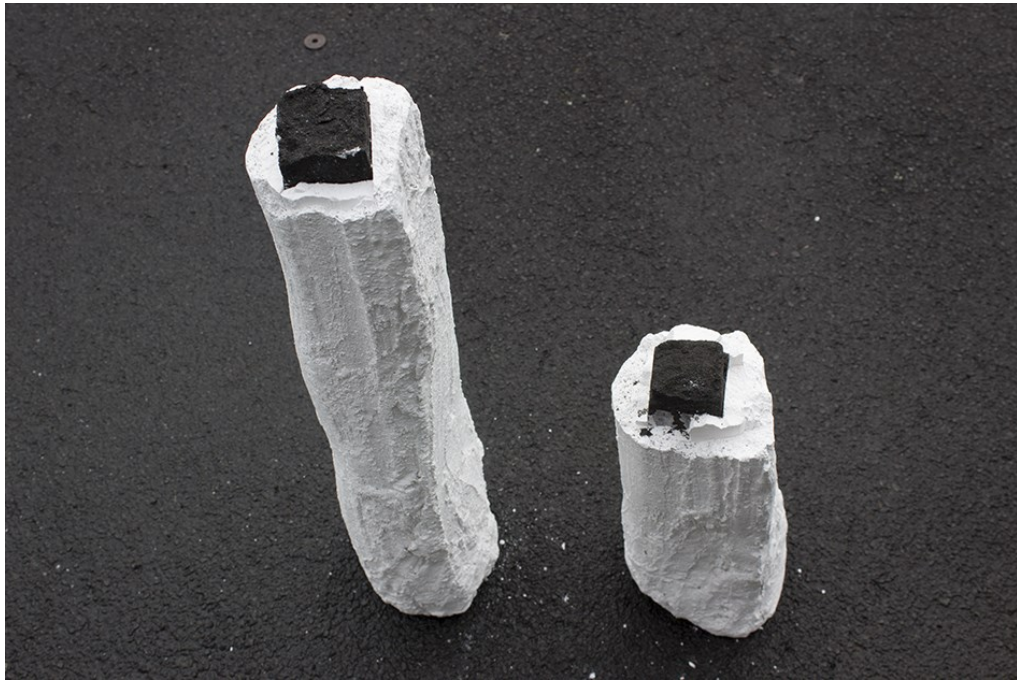


Figure 55 Baked *Black Sand Measuring Posts*, in their plaster casts- after bisque firing, 2016

### Deceptive intentions: made to disappear

Smithson believed that entropy was actively ending the world in its present form, stating "in the ultimate future the whole universe will burn out and be transformed into an all-encompassing sameness."<sup>65</sup> There was no time frame for this apocalyptic vision, entropy moves at its own pace, subject to what, where and how the process is set off. It is a deceptive process that creeps up on you and the action whether fast or slow is not always noticeable until it is too late.

In conjunction with acceleration, my practice has opened up exploration of slowness as I wrestle with the chronophobic impulse<sup>66</sup> to speed up some of the processes I was working with. While the rocks represent accelerated time, the subsequent black sand measuring posts, made via the same process, test ideas of duration and slowness, intended to measure the tidal heights and also processes of slow erosion or entropy as the sand gradually breaks loose and returns to the sea. The posts, although they appear to look the same, have been deceptively made with different ratios of sand and catalysts so they erode at differing rates over time, until they completely disappear.

<sup>65</sup>Smithson, *Entropy and the New Monuments*, accessed November 2, 2014 <http://www.robertsmithson.com>

<sup>66</sup>Lee, xii





Figure 57 Cast *Black Sand* Measuring Post, 2016

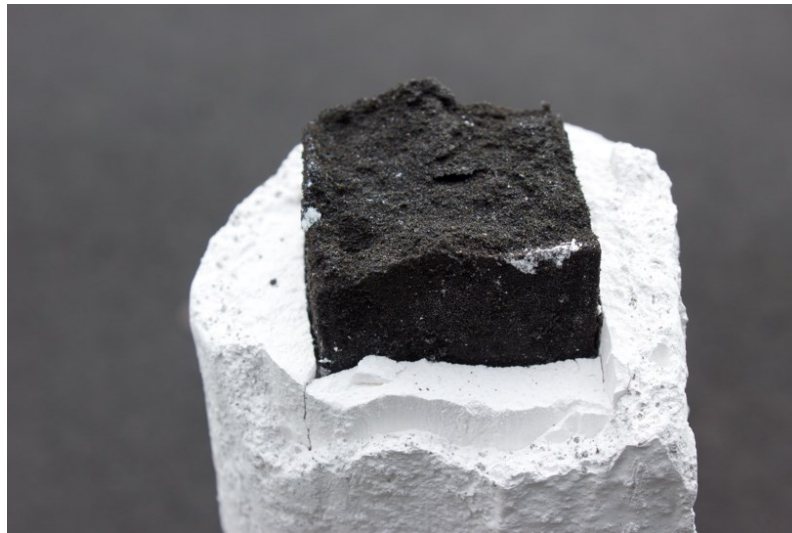


Figure 56 Cast *Black Sand* Measuring Post, 2016

Making these two sand posts wasn't as simple as the outcome appears. Materials and temperatures were carefully measured. Post one, was four parts black sand to one part frit. Post two, a ratio of three parts sand to one part frit. The plaster cast contained silica to stop the plaster exploding. Wax prototypes had to be made for casting first. The casts and sand were slowly bisque fired at 960 degrees – however they still exploded in the kiln. It is suspected they toppled or this could be due to water content in the plaster.

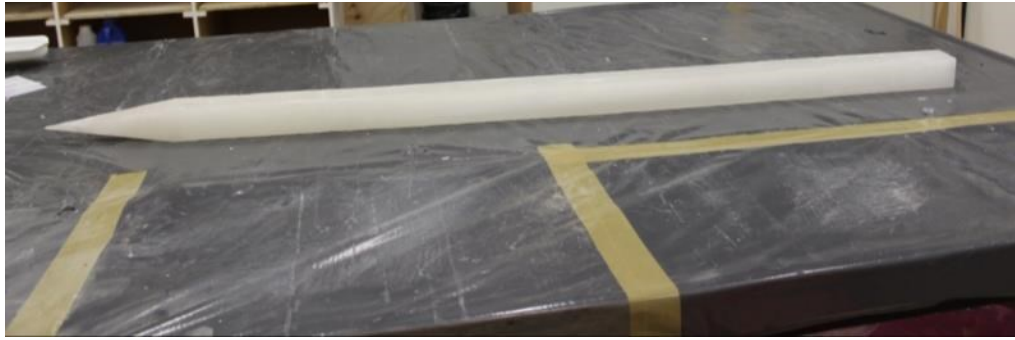


Figure 58 Wax cast of post for making plaster cast mould, 2016



Figure 59 Compressing frit and sand mix in mould



Figure 60 Mould for wax

Images of process for making *Black Sand Measuring Posts*.



Figure 61 Blue-green clay in red bucket, 2016

**Blue-green clay studio test site** (The studio as a site or place of transferal of site conditions, part 1)

The blue green clay is a hidden layer underneath the gold sand at Aotea Harbour-lagoon. When freshly dug up, it looks its best, the blue is bright with a turquoise depth. It was an accidental find, an exciting discovery that was revealed to me when I was collecting a bucket of sand at the Te Papatapu Road site.

Back at my studio I began to investigate the qualities of the clay, textures, colours and pliability. I decided to heat a sample of the clay to see what might happen. I suspected that it may change colour when heated. I made some small items to test. After one bisque firing my suspicions were confirmed, the clay had turned a mild apricot color. I felt disappointed that it hadn't remained blue. The only way to maintain the bluish colour was to dry the clay naturally. I thought about the natural process of erosion and the grinding of sand and sifting. I was interested in using the clay to reveal some of the site qualities through time based experiments. In particular the muddy sand stone edges and slow tidal currents and rain. I ground the dried clay into a powder through a sieve, transforming it into a soft opaque blue-green powder.

I set up an experiment in my studio where I filled a bike tyre tube with water, it was perforated with holes to allow the water to drip onto the clay powder scattered at a distance underneath it. The water released slowly, each droplet impacted on the dry clay powder beneath with a sound and gradually the clay absorbed the water and eventually became a clay form again.



Figure 62 Perforated rubber inner tyre filled with water, suspended over clay powder



Figure 63 Detail of droplets releasing



Figure 64 Dried clay powder





Figure 65



Figure 66

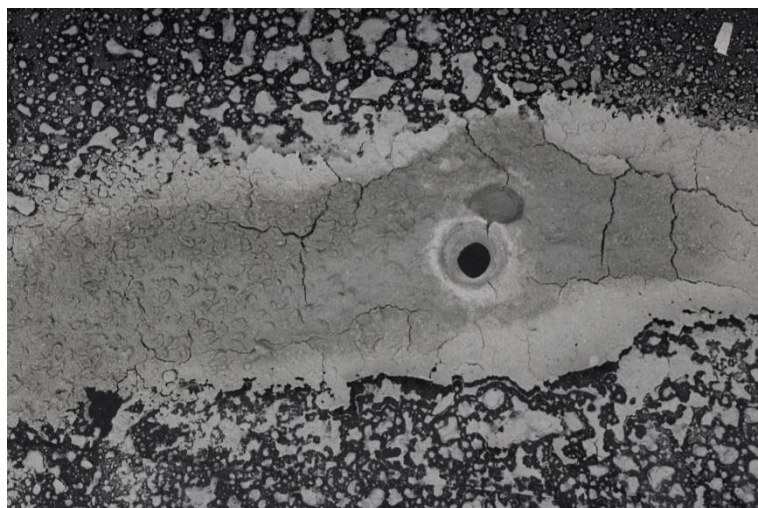


Figure 67



**The studio: test site** (The studio as a site or place of transferal of site conditions, part 2).

The *Talk week* group critiques in July 2016 provided an opportunity to present my project in an indoor site. I could test the resonance of my manufactured rocks in a 'non-site'. My work comprised of videos of two iterations of *Silent Drifts* (2016). The fake and real stones were presented on a table, and open black polythene bags of clay and sand were placed in a line on the floor. The studio shelves contained project paraphernalia such as the blue silicone stone moulds, rocks and materials. My working studio/lab became part of the art work, a dynamic space where the viewer, an unintentional participant, could experience the ongoing open-ended processes of my project. I had hoped this would communicate a sense of the site, material processes and temporality. Some viewers saw this as a space of reflection, others expressed confusion as to what should they be viewing and how to determine between artwork and studio environment. One audience member commented that he was, "[...] looking, searching for things – not sure how to tap into it -not sure I like the experience."<sup>67</sup> There was an ambiguity between the experience of the studio visit and the gallery for exhibition-viewing, where the role of the audience was put into question. Audience response is an evolving aspect of my practice, where the boundary between the artwork, exhibition environment and the audience is blurred. As can be seen in my projects, *For the Time Being* 2015 and *Up Rise* 2016, where the audience was able to walk on the sodden grass work and through the constructed puddles, my intention was that they would experience the temporal site conditions and material qualities through sensory ways, being able to feel and smell the materiality of the work directly as it changes, differently from an image or a painting.

#### **Photography and video as outcome:**

Photographic images and video have enabled me to capture particular qualities of time in all three sites. Similar to the cast stones and collected materials, the images convey a sense of the site and it's a material processes. Aside from my first encounter at each site, the subsequent following visits have been planned around weather conditions, tidal levels and times of day. Where dawn, dusk, overcast, mist and rain have been sought to highlight the emotional and mysterious ambience of ancientness, time and hidden which I am exploring in the materiality of the sites. Initially the images were not intended to be more than personal documentation of the temporal site processes. However as the project has progressed, some of the images have become a component of the overall body of art work, in particular the Aotea lagoon series of images as they reveal successional processes. Video, has enabled repeated recordings of sequential iterations of work. Where the balloons movement in *Silent Drifts* reveal, duration, quickness and slowness that are seen in 'real time'. Directional shifts, light and movement of light are also recorded. Sound is captured, and has accidentally become a key component of the work *Island Transects* and *Silent Drifts* – recording rain on the balloons. Sound has also provided clues to the peripheral context, where birds, cars and aeroplanes can be heard in the background at times. Video has enabled transfer of these qualities from the outdoor site to the interior exhibition space.

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<sup>67</sup> Audience member, AUT Talk Week Critique - In my Studio, June 2016



Figure 68 *Black Sand Measuring Posts*, 2016 – Te Papatapu Road, Aotea Harbour

### Giving Back – Silent Intrusions; Black Sand Measuring Posts

I re-introduced two of the *Black Sand Measuring Posts* back into the site at Aotea Harbour - lagoon. They were embedded into the sandy mud floor of the lagoon as silent intrusions. With the hope the post-like structures would measure tidal levels and the material flow of the water, gathering watermark traces that record this dynamism, then eventually erode at differing rates over time to nothing. This nothingness would be a transformation from a solid form, back to its original state of millions of particles of black sand.

I retrieved them after 90 days. They were covered in green algae and mud. The surface showed signs of erosion and green algae was growing on posts, revealing the tidal level. I was quite happy with this subtle transformation over time.

For my final art work, my intention was to explore this disintegration further. I made a series of 10 posts composed of black sand and frit measured to varying ratios, so that they may disintegrate at different rates of time. Once embedded, the *Black Sand Measuring Posts* were documented through photographic images and video, over intervals of time. My hope was to capture the material changes as the *Black Sand Measuring Posts* disappear.

This new form depends much more on curious alterations brought about in the stone itself by means of metallic or other deposits, or on changes in its shape due to erosion or serendipitous breakage.<sup>68</sup> Whereas various iterations of *Silent Drifts*, (2016) were instantly ephemeral, the balloons were fleeting revealers of invisible energies, moving unpredictably, over space. Once left in the site and set free, they disappeared from view

<sup>68</sup> Roger Calloise. *The Writing of Stones*, (University Press, Virginia, Charlottesville, USA, 1985) 4-5.

– either floating out to sea or rolling along the sand to different locations. Although out of site, I contemplated the impact of their eventual demise, breaking up by bursting and leaving thin black rubber traces of processed material in the lagoon. Unintentionally, by setting off the balloons, my own human impact on the non-human layers of this vast geological system has consequences. The latex is plant based and infused with toxic chemicals such as dibutylamine; to slow down the eventual degradation and absorption into the ecological systems. This is a conflicted aspect of the project, where toxic material composite could potentially harm the natural environment within the harbour, while there is also the chance of wildlife ingesting the balloon fragments. It is over time, the repetition of these seemingly small environmental corruptions, form the toxic material layers that are now affecting the environmental health of the planet, setting off the new geological epoch I fear so much, ‘the Anthropocene’.

In contrast, the heated frit that cements the black sand measuring posts, is made of sand and sand silica. It has transformed into a rock like glass material. When it breaks down and is absorbed into the natural environment, it potentially replaces what has been taken.



Figure 69 *Black Sand Measuring Posts* embedded into the estuary, Aotea Harbour, 2016



Figure 70 *Black Sand Measuring Posts* marking the tidal heights and flows Aotea Harbour, 2016





Figure 71 *Black Sand Measuring Posts* after 90 days, covered in algae and mud, installed at Aotea Harbour, 2016



Figure 72 *Black Sand Measuring Posts* after 90 days, covered in algae and mud, installed at Aotea Harbour, 2016





Figure 73 real volcanic bomb and a baked black sand sample with frit and molochite accelerants, 2016

## 5. Conclusion

### **What can I know? what must I do? and what can I hope?**

Experimentation with ideas of acceleration and slowness, led to a complete cycle of material processes using the collected sands from Aotea lagoon and Taharoa beach. I have traced a time line that starts with pre-human existence, where the material composites were originally accreted as molten lava, then cooled to solid rock, then slowly ground to sand. The sands are collected and accelerated through heat into manufactured stones or posts that potentially will slowly disintegrate back into sand again. These cycles are intended to emulate natural systems, accelerating the time frame of geology with my human interference. In a sense this project is a collaboration between human and non-human, where boundaries have been crossed through these material interactions. As Barikin observes “Art can now be observed as an uneasy collaboration between humans and non-humans.”<sup>69</sup>

My approach to making is often ephemeral, where thresholds of breaking down and accretion are explored with material forms that ultimately disappear. I have noticed that this ephemeral approach opens up a type of challenge to perception, even a form of deception that occurs in this process of making and placing objects that appear and then disappear. Often the material form of the work is initially tangible in a way that alludes to permanence, but gradually slips or crumbles away, or in the case of the balloons, burst.

<sup>69</sup> Barikin, *Arch Fossils and Future Fossils: The Speculative Paleontology of Julian Charrière*, 2014



Figure 74 *Island Transects*, 2016, Pig Bay, Motutapu Island, 2016

There is a tension between the illusion of permanence and the reality of a world that is vulnerable, contingent and ephemeral that occurs throughout my project. Ideas of deception have not been an intentional thread in this research. However I have noticed as I explored ideas of temporality and thresholds through tropes of acceleration and slowness that I was setting up scenarios where the making of objects and installations was often unpredictable and where perceptions of them were quite deceptive, or difficult to decipher.

For instance, during the talk week critique (see Chapter 5) the ancient real stones were not distinguishable to the audience, who perceived that 'all' the stones were recently made fakes that had been produced through kiln based processes. The 'fake' stones, although an exploration of time and acceleration, were read as imitations rather than as duplicates of the real stones. *The Black Sand Measuring Posts* are another example of this ambiguity, when made (through bisque firing), they appear to be solid black volcanic rock. However some are to be less compact and will possibly disintegrate over time. While others will endure for a longer period.

In *Island Transects*, where lines of string were placed along the Pig Bay foreshore at dusk, I noticed that many of the responses carried a sense of disappointment, as though the site's fragility had been unexpected, so when revealed to be fragile was seen as a form of deception. Human responses along the *Island Transect* seemed to provide varying perceptions of the site history. Acting in silence seemed to extract from the participants, unforeseen emotional and protective responses to the terrain and its inhabitants. My hunch that the time of day would affect the participants responses to the site seemed correct, but I had not expected to find the word 'sorry' taped to the transect, nor 'I am leaving now', nor 'kiwi's call when we are not here'. Some of the responses opened up cultural and ethical questions by speaking of intrusion in the site.



Figure 75 *Silent Drifts*, Aotea Harbour, 2016

My own exploration was often quietly intrusive, firstly as a nosy tourist, then a meddler, subsequently placing intrusions back into the site, all in hope of discovering unknown and unforeseen events. These projects question our perception and expectation of a particular site experience rather than the authenticity of the materials.

As my exploration of time and materiality progressed it became obvious at times, that there were ruptures between expected logic and the findings. The open-ended and uncontrolled aspect of the works allowed for uncertainties and unpredictable events, such as the erratic movements of the balloons in *Silent Drifts* at Aotea Harbour lagoon.

Video recordings enabled successive and multiple iterations of some experiments, such as in *Silent Drifts*. I had hoped to repeat some of the iterations, believing I could get similar outcomes. However this was never to be, as the subtle shifts of wind and water currents never repeated identically. Something that will never change is this state of constant unrest that occurs in these sites. The effects of meteorological and geological influences could be seen over time and were often experienced during the visits. As site materials moved and settled, layers and sediments were uncovered and recovered. For example blue–green clay, mudstone and coastal formations are continually shaped by the slow tidal erosion. Seasonal changes are noticeable in the wetland plantings – where phases of brown and green are clues to cycles of their coastal existence. These changes became a part of the art work, in photographs of the site conditions. Uncertain, unknown and unseen threads of temporality connect the projects that have emerged from the site explorations.



Figure 76 Ross T. Smith and Manaia Sanerivi at the Kawhia Fish'n chip shop, 2016

I have been reluctant to include the photographic documentation as a significant part of my body of work. I have positioned the focus of my practice in material explorations and installations, while the photographs are a personal record for my use within my practice. However the accuracy and potential insight gained from documentation through photography and video have enabled me to record some qualities such as tidal nuances, mists, stillness and successive movements within the sites. The video recordings also manage to communicate aspects of the atmosphere, light, scale and space in a 'real time' mode. As I move through the project, the idea of revealing to an audience the material and atmospheric site conditions in a non-abstract form, is something I am now exploring.

Similarly, sound has appeared as an unplanned layer within the works. For example sound recordings from videos emerged as a type of ephemeral fossil that has opened future explorations of time. The video/sound recording of bare feet on rocks moving slowly through water, in *Island Transects* has become an influential component of the art work and has inspired further explorations. Recordings of rain hitting balloons at Aotea lagoon are also unexpected aspects of an iteration of *Silent Drifts* and informed time based studio explorations with a tyre tube, dripping water and clay.

To detect sound traces within a site or particular place, or geological form has become a developing focus of concern as I look forward to my future research practice. I am interested in looking at new forms of exploratory technology as documentation of sound and types of visual recordings; perhaps engaging instruments from the past and

potential future. I am also interested in how the project could further explore acceleration and slowness and thresholds through material processes. Site and issues of scale in an uneasy collaboration with non-humans.”<sup>70</sup>

Documentation videos of the various Iterations of research work and final work, have been posted on vimeo <https://vimeo.com/user60509107>

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<sup>70</sup> Barikin, *Arch Fossils and Future Fossils: The Speculative Paleontology of Julian Charriere*, 2014



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## Appendix

### Aotea Site : Tangata Whenua

There was one question, that had haunted me while working from the Aotea site – and that was; does this land/foreshore belong to someone? should I seek permission? if so, who do I ask?

The location of my installation was near the Te Papatapu marae. The marae seemed always silent not a car or light to be seen at night, houses were not visible from the site. I had never encountered any person at the lagoon, although traces of fresh human activity were often visible. At first I had assumed this was public land, but as time went by I often wondered about the Tangata whenua of this side of Aotea Harbour. Then one day, I accidentally left my car light on (my boot hadn't shut properly). This happened twice in row.

I had been at my site for hours documenting my installation late at night and then again the next day. While making a video recording, lost in the trance of cicadas and tidal rhythms, I was awoken by a person crashing through the bush towards me. Is that your car? he called out. The local man was relieved to find me on the land...alive, not washed up or stuck in the quick mud-sand. He had seen my foot prints leaving the shore, but none returning. The car light was left on twice, this deceptively made it look like I had been there for days. We walked through the bush back to my car, three other local people were waiting on the beach for news. They were relieved when we walked out of the coastal bush. I felt silly and terrible to have caused this concern. But it was also a comfort to know they had been keeping watch on my car. All along, my quiet visits to the site had been noticed by the local iwi, Ngati Te Wihi .

I told them what I had been doing at the site, about the transferal of the sands and the installation of the objects. It was a relief to let them know. The elder in the group responded Art project?! Oh that is all right, that is fine, you can do that there.





Figure 77 10 x cast *Black Sand Measuring Posts* in the studio before transportation to Aotea Harbour lagoon for install, black sand and frit, 103cm x 5cm x 5cm x 5cm x 5cm

## Installation at Aotea Harbour-lagoon

The *Black Sand Measuring Posts* were quite fragile and had to be carefully carried to the site one by one and installed at low tide. The pre-planned configuration didn't seem to work spatially in the site. So in between low and high tide I re-configured the posts to cover a larger area, eventually forming a line of upright and fallen sand posts in the harbour lagoon. I was a little disappointed that I had defaulted to conventional linear form. Although this would record the heights and velocity of tidal movements incrementally in a transect line.

The effect of the full moon tide was an unforeseen surprise, the water quietly crept forward fast...eventually drowning the posts, until they were invisible during high tide. At near half-moon (ten days later) the tide moved slower and only managed to reach the height of half to two thirds of a post, lingering and then receding. This height is documented by video and algae growth in the final art work. Over the course of two weeks I documented many iterations of the receding low and encroaching high tide, in varying weather conditions through lens base media of video and photography. I also made many sound recordings using a zoom recorder.

The project is ongoing, and the installation remains in the Aotea Harbour lagoon, dually breaking down and gathering layers of algae until it disappears over time.



Figure 78 Installation of *Black Sand Measuring Post*, Aotea Harbour, February 2017



Figure 79 Final configuration of *Black Sand Measuring Posts* – partially submerged, Aotea Harbour, February 2017





Figure 80 *Black Sand Measuring Posts* submerged during full moon tide, Aotea Harbour, February 2017



Figure 81 Completely submerged, full moon high tide, there is no visible trace of installed *Black Sand Measuring Posts*, February 2017

## AUT Installation – Final Show

### *Leaving Things Behind, February 2017*

Room 404 WM AUT, was selected for the final exhibition of the Installation.

The materiality of the concrete floor enabled the objects to be viewed on a neutral background. The adhoc room shape allowed for a slightly irregular configuration of elements, enabling the viewer to both walk around the space and view the projected video at a reasonable distance. There was also a large area of wall space to project the video documentation.

Spot lighting was set up on the floor to highlight the forms of the *Black Sand Measuring Posts* and the plastic net catch of fake stones.

#### **1. Silent Intrusions: Aotea Lagoon**

Video and sound: 6 minute excerpt of permanent installation of 10 *Black Sand Measuring Posts* at Aotea Lagoon (ongoing).

At the site, the video camera had been fixed in one position while documenting the durational motion of the incoming and outgoing tides over the period of a day and evening at the site. We can watch the sea covering and then revealing the black sand posts. Some are upright and others have broken and fallen, laying in the muddy sand. The real time duration has been substantially condensed through the editing process.

The weather can be seen along the horizon shifting from a sunny day to a stormy rainy evening. In hindsight I see the video as quietly melancholy. The overlaid stratas of sound record the gurgles and ripples of the tidal fluxes as well as external sounds on land. Where the coastal *Macrocarpa*'s, *Toitoe* and *Harakeke* were home to bees, flies, cicadas, crickets and various birds.

The video can be viewed on vimeo <https://vimeo.com/user60509107>

#### **2. Black Sand Measuring Posts**

*Bisque-fired Taharoa Beach sand posts. Retrieved after 90 days in Aotea Lagoon.*

One post was placed leaning against the wall and the other (fragmented) lay on the floor connecting to it. The spot lighting was placed on the floor to create a strong shadow that amplified this angular placement within a circular light. 90 days of time can be seen accreted to the surface of the posts in the form of dried green algae and brown mud. The green algae also reveals the height of the water. Entropy is seen in patches of the surface of the posts that have eroded slightly, shaped by the repetition of the tidal fluxes.

### 3. Catch of Stones

*Bisque-fired Aotea and Taharoa beach sand stones. Retrieved after 30 days in Aotea Lagoon.*

The catch of fake stones were still attached to the metal T – bar stake with a cord that had held them in place at the site. The cord tension indicated the pull of the tidal motion. The net revealed twigs and debris from the site. The fake stones have faded and transformed showing signs of corrosion from repeated tidal movement over the time of 30 days.

### 4. Aotea Stillness

*2.4m x 45 cm mild steel trough containing salt water collected from the Aotea site  
Covering a 2.3m length of broken fragments of a Black Sand Measuring Post.*

The sea water almost completely covers the length of broken fragments, a portion partially visible at one end. Emulating the fallen posts in the Aotea site. The breaks in the *Black Sand Measuring Post* were intended to suggest geological movement or shifts over time, like a core sample of rock. The quietness of the water caught the reflection of the video and was intended to reveal any human movement through ripples or vibrations. Although it remained mostly silent.





Figure 82 Installation view of *Catch of Stones*, *Aotea Stillness*, *Black Sand Measuring Posts*, *Silent Intrusions*; video



Figure 83 View of *Aotea Stillness* and *Black Sand Measuring Posts*, February 2017



Figure 84 *Aotea Stillness*, with the reflection of the video, (mild steel, Aotea sea water, black sand, frit) February 2017



Figure 85 *Aotea Stillness* and *Black Sand Measuring Posts*, February 2017



Figure 86 *Catch of Stones* (Aotea sand, Taharoa sand, molochite, plastic netting, steel T bar post) February 2017



Figure 87 *Catch of Stones with collected site debris*, February 2017





Figure 88 Detail Catch of Stones, February 2017



Figure 89 *Black Sand Measuring Posts* (looking back into room 404), February 2017



Figure 90 Detail, *Black Sand Measuring Post*, February 2017



Figure 91 Detail, *Black Sand Measuring Post*, February 2017





Figure 92 *Black Sand Measuring Posts*, February 2017



Figure 93 Detail, *Black Sand Measuring Post*, February 2017



Figure 94 Detail, *Black Sand Measuring Post*, revealing accreted algae coating, February 2017



Figure 95 Detail, *Black Sand Measuring Post*, revealing accreted algae coating, February 2017



Figure 96 Video Installation of *Black Sand Measuring Posts*, 5 minutes, February 2017.



Figure 97 Video Installation of *Black Sand Measuring Posts*, 5 minutes, February 2017