

The Grass That Itches My Skin:

Painted Queer Narratives Within The Rural Landscape

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Abstract

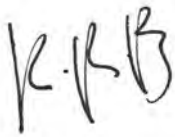
This practice-led research *The Grass That Itches My Skin: Painted Narratives Within The Rural Landscape* explores the intersection of queer identity, space, and gender binary. My paintings depict softened queer male bodies in rural Aotearoa, creating utopian spaces within traditionally masculine landscapes. This project examines forms of masculinity built through aesthetics, then subverted by queer bodies. Personal and constructed narratives interweave to create narratives of queer intimacy within rural spaces. I utilise 'delusion' to make my experiences seem greater than what they were. Delusion and narration are methodologies which extend and contort my experiences of queerness into utopian realms which inform my understanding of space and identity. This research fuses fact and fiction through painting to understand the nuances of my identity from small town to big city.

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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 and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'K. R. B.' with a stylized flourish on the 'B'.

Keani Tia Rewha-Bedggood

15/05/2025

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Saad, my beautiful boy. Thank you for bearing with me during this academic journey. For cooking me dinner and dropping me off at the studio. You inspire me every day, and I love you.

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Lastly, thank you to my family who have nurtured me through so much. My mother and father taught me what it means to work hard for what you want and to succeed at everything you do. The people who gave me the passion for creativity. My five siblings have been nothing but supportive and loving despite all the challenges we have faced.

Introduction

My existence as a queer man in ‘the rural’ feels ironic in the sense that my identity causes me to feel small and enclosed, yet I have existed in a place where physical space is abundant. This project began with my separation from my hometown of Whangārei as I moved to Tāmaki Makaurau and began to understand how the nuances of my identity differed from a small town to a big city.

This practice-led research explores the intersections between the gender binary, space, and identity. I use narrative painting to explore queer intimacy in rural spaces and to understand masculinity as something I experience through my body and through aesthetics – not tied to gender. Narration allows me to fuse my lived experience with what I call a ‘delusion’ of dramatising the experience and/or making it feel bigger than it was. Delusion and narrative are methodologies which defamiliarise my understanding of places and experiences that are familiar to me.

Chapter 1 explores my connection to rural space as a queer person. Drawing on feminist writer and scholar Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology*¹, I consider how queer identity can reinform and reshape the rural. I use listing as a sensory method of accessing memory, which in turn drives a drawing/painting practice that blends personal recollections with found imagery. Through this process, I become more familiar with my lived experience of rurality, while also defamiliarising it by weaving in fictional elements. Alongside listing and drawing, I engage with collaging as a compositional method to explore how the aesthetics of masculinity can intersect with queer intimacy. This process helps me examine how queerness might subvert outdated archetypes of masculinity, opening up new ways of seeing – and being within – rural spaces.

In Chapter 2, I explore how personal narrative can be reworked through the lens of delusion. I use delusion as a methodological approach – one that exaggerates and elevates my queer experiences beyond their original reality. To structure these narratives, I introduce a method of sequencing that draws from filmic references. Delusion becomes a guiding thread as I assemble personal and found imagery, allowing the narrative to swell and shift.

¹ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

Chapter 2 also delves into poetry as a visual and narrative device: I write to articulate scenes I choose not to paint, using words to represent sexual acts instead of relying on figurative imagery within my paintings. Poetry becomes a visual language in itself, transforming text into image within a sequential installation. I examine how rural signage can be reframed to house this poetic language, rendering it as a painted narrative.

Finally, chapter 3 explores colour in relation to my colour blindness, how colour is reminiscent of certain experiences, and how colour informs certain scenes. Derek Jarman's *Chroma* becomes crucial in understanding how colour symbolises certain moments of time and experiences.² I view colour as symbolic of people, experiences, sex, temperature, and intimacy. Chromatic cropping and framing are methods I use to focus on the subtleties of queer intimacy, subtracting explicitness to preserve a sense of softness without objectifying the figures' bodies. I further explore framing as a way to reimagine rural motifs through a queer lens, highlighting the tensions between people and place.

² Derek Jarman, *Chroma: A Book of Colour; June '93*, (London: Vintage, 1995).

Between Pastures and Fence Posts

Ghosts of Time and Place

At thirteen years old, I performed the act of ‘coming out’ in front of three friends. The tent in rural Dargaville felt like an alienated universe separate from society – in ways, it made Whangārei feel like a big city. This barren landscape of open fields instantly became a place separate from my oppressive realities. Feminist writer and scholar Sara Ahmed discusses existing ‘in line’ in *Queer Phenomenology*: ‘The body that is ‘in line’ is one that can extend into space, while such spaces are effects of retracting those lines, which is another way of describing ‘extension’’.³ Ahmed understands ‘in line’ as a normative existence, and those that are ‘out of line’ would exist as bodies that subvert the normative.

Now living in Tāmaki Makaurau, I reflect on the gravity of my queer existence in ‘the rural’⁴ – my existence was out of line. This place no longer exists in my life, yet I still hold the memory of my queer body traced into these places.

The rural has become a figure that is made real through drawing and painting. My works regularly picture two queer bodies framed within a scene, with the rural landscape acting as the body that holds and protects them. In some paintings, the rural landscape becomes the protagonist of the scene, occupying the entire canvas. It gains a cognitive consciousness through the gaze of the viewer and figures that occupy spaces within its embrace.

Drawing is a tool that combines lived experience, personal imagery, and sourced/found imagery. I draw based on this amalgamation, weaving fiction within a personal narrative. This method familiarises me with different rural locations I have been to while also deconstructing them by fusing unfamiliar rural locations into them. I can then create characters that occupy these spaces, forging new narratives of queer intimacy.

³ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 66.

⁴ In this document, ‘the rural’ is used as a noun, referring to a conceptual or figurative entity rather than merely an adjective describing a place.

Academic scholar and author Joshua Parker discusses in his essay, 'Queer Rural Space in Early Twenty-First Century American Narrative' ruralism and its connection to queer identities through the writings of queer American authors. Parker understands the rural as not defined as wilderness or uncultivated land; neither is it urban nor developed. It exists in the middle.⁵ 'Queer' in the rural exists as a disruption of the area; queer disrupts the notions of values held within the rural environment, like progressiveness or fastness within stagnancy. Queer writer and author Jack Halberstam understands this queer disruption of rural areas as 'the introduction of sexual (and simultaneously racial or ethnic) minorities into heteronormative and white Anglo-Saxon Protestant story worlds'.⁵

My sleepless solitude (study) (Figure 1) pictures an open window leading out into the field of a rural area. The window in the drawing is an imaginary space, constructed from a memory of a past home I had inhabited, fused with the backyard of a home my parents occupied. This creates a scene that transcends a specific time and location. Although my lived experience is an integral part of my practice, I tend to skew away from specifically identifying these scenes as places in Whangārei – there is more freedom in defamiliarising myself with these rural spaces to create newer, exaggerated narratives.



Figure 1. Keani Rewha, 2024, *My sleepless solitude (study)*, graphite pencil on paper, 145 x 210 mm.

⁵ Jack Halberstam, quoted in Joshua Parker, 'Queer Rural Space in Early Twenty-First Century American Narrative: Listing Landscapes in George Hodgman, Ocean Vuong, and Louis Ceci,' *AmLit: American Literatures* 4, no. 2 (October 3, 2024): 123–38. <https://doi.org/10.25364/27.4:2024.2.7>.

As a queer person, I list things so my heteronormative counterparts can understand my experiences, the weight of evidence, and to make them believe that my experiences are not subordinate to theirs (Figure 2). In my practice, I use listing as a method to dramatise my experience, as some deluded memory where some of it merely did not happen, but also most of it did. Parker⁶ writes that listing familiarises oneself with the environment, allowing the viewer to be immersed in the space you are creating. Listing is a methodology that helps me pinpoint specific moments within memories, and when layered back together, these lists form narratives that deepen my familiarity with the rural.⁷

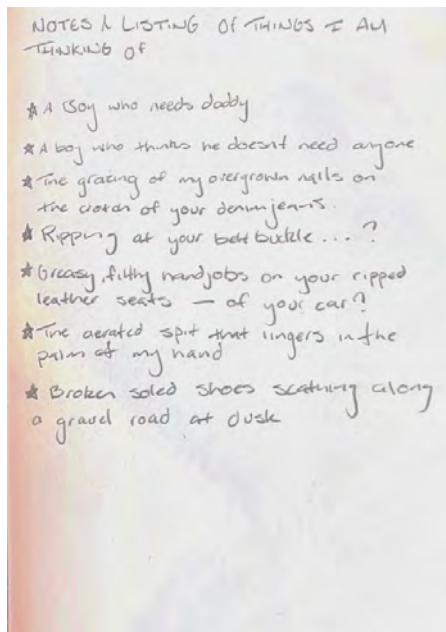


Figure 2. Keani Rewha, 2024, Scan of List, 145 x 210 mm.

Listing locates place, people, senses, feelings, emotions, and colours that form every composition I am making. American poet and essayist Ocean Vuong uses listing as a method to familiarise one with a place in his novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*.

During a summer job on a tobacco farm, the narrator Little Dog (based on Vuong) meets a boy named Trevor, the grandson of the tobacco farm owner. The two adolescent boys develop a relationship that spans their fundamental years of teenagehood. Vuong details an experience of a sexual encounter between Little Dog and Trevor in his bedroom:

⁶ Joshua Parker, 'Queer Rural Space in Early Twenty-First Century Narrative', 125.

⁷ The gathering of details to remember the scenario that took place in this space - a big window frame, broken fence posts, the sun gazing across from the west, the cool air on a summer evening.

In that room, among the Star Wars poster (The Empire Strikes Back) peeling above his unmade bed, among the empty root beer cans, the twenty-pound dumbbell, one half of a broken skateboard, the desk covered with loose change, empty gum packets, gas station receipts, weed crumbs, fentanyl patches and empty dime bags, coffee mugs ringed brown with old water and joint roaches, a copy of *Of Mice and Men*, empty shell casings from a Smith & Wesson, there were no questions. We made friction of each other and friction of everything else. He had shaved his head in the sink that day and bits of hair pricked us everywhere we moved, our fingers lost around belt buckles.⁸

This excerpt poses a remembrance of a core memory, where Vuong lists the contents of Trevor's bedroom, allowing us to be immersed in this space as Vuong awaits for the two to engage in an intimate moment under the sheets. I gravitate heavily towards this specific page, as this detailing of a bedroom creates a feeling of anticipation; he is in this space, waiting for Trevor to swoop him under the sheets, to rub against him and unbuckle his pants. My work visualises seemingly mundane moments – a feeling of gazing onto a dirt road, inside a room, looking through a window into an open field. However, these moments are charged with reflection and anticipation; my work looks upon the moments that took place within these environments. The narratives open up where I can visualise these fleeting intimate encounters through the rural small-town landscape, offering a sense of tenderness and melancholy through queer encounters, linking to a feeling of escapism.

Drawing allows me to collect my memories (whether real or imagined) within a contained book. The question of being real or imagined familiarises and defamiliarises me with the narratives I am building. The characters become an extension of my memory as imagined narratives spill into my notebook, and ultimately onto canvas.

⁸ Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, (Penguin Press, 2019), 110.

In turn, drawing allows me to piece the puzzle back together. I can reconfigure tensions through person and place, the longing to be in this place with someone. I can withhold information, allowing fiction to emerge with a focus on intimacy without exposing the reality of my own experience. Having these experiences of queer intimacy within rural spaces, I am unveiling how a mark is forever left within these spaces; the slowness of rurality allows this memory or experience to be contained forever. Therefore, I reflect on these imprinted experiences to visualise them through painting.

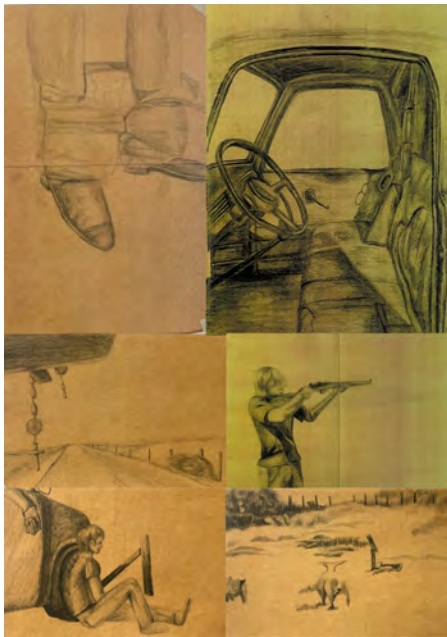


Figure 3. Grid of sketches, 2024-2025, scan by Keani Rewha.

The Velvet Rope

Acts of conforming have informed my existence as a queer body in a regressive small town. Since moving to Tāmaki Makaurau, I have felt an immediate shift in my existence as a queer body. The big city moves fast, people of varying identities are everywhere, and, in a sense, being queer becomes more normalised; though discrimination still exists, my identity feels less of a target. In ‘Queer Rural Space in Early Twenty-First Century American Narrative’, Jack Halberstam defines the migration from country to town as a spatial storyline where the individual relocates to a larger, more accepting city after experiencing life in a small town marked by suspicion, discrimination, and secrecy.⁹

In a small town, I have tried to conform but have never been successful at it, as I always seem to be clocked as gay. Growing up, I noticed that both of my parents held a balance between masculinity and femininity, and they allowed me to embrace my flamboyant nature. This upbringing reshaped my understanding of masculinity, not as a trait confined to gender, but as something fluid, coexisting with femininity.

I have questioned the way femininity and queerness exist in the same sphere. In my hometown,¹⁰ I feel the need to strip myself down to an idealised version of my male body: a boy who can fit in with the people around, where style has not progressed past slim-fitted jeans, a t-shirt, and sneakers.

Collaging is a method that allows me to merge images of queer intimacy with masculine rural aesthetics. I can crop and focus on the intimate parts of images, then use oil paint to magnify this moment on a larger scale. Cutting and pasting images together creates compositions that reimagine disparate images into an exaggerated scene. I look towards images of rural landscapes, old vehicles, abandoned buildings, roads to nowhere, forms of intimacy, erotic figures, body parts, and specific clothing types – denim jeans and dirty boots. Collaging has helped me to understand a type of masculinity that my practice is trying to subvert. I take inspiration from farmers and trade workers (people I grew up around) to employ the roughness of manual labour as an aesthetic through my work. I subvert this aesthetic by placing queer imagery within it.

⁹ Jack Halberstam quoted by Joshua Park in ‘Queer Rural Space in Early Twenty-First Century American Narrative.’, 124.

¹⁰ I acknowledge that other queer people do exist in Whangārei, though - this is more of a personal reflection of how I feel.

Finnish artist Tom of Finland subverts the masculine archetype by positioning and costuming the male body. Author Guy Snaith discusses Tom's use of hyper-masculinised, blue-collar imagery to validate gay men's desires and reshape perceptions of masculinity.¹¹ The figures embody strength and dominance, subverting the heterosexual space and tailoring it to their own. Within my practice, I am questioning the definition of masculinity and employing an aesthetic that understands masculinity through objects, the roughness of surfaces, and clothing. It becomes subverted through the queer acts that play out in these narratives, where the softness of queer intimacy is played out on top of the masculine.

Tom approaches his work from an erotic standpoint (Figure 4), whereas my work (Figure 5) relies on the fragmentation of imagery and the withholding of a full explicit scene to highlight the softness of an intimate encounter. Collaging lets me analyse what needs to be withheld to preserve the softness of queer intimacy.

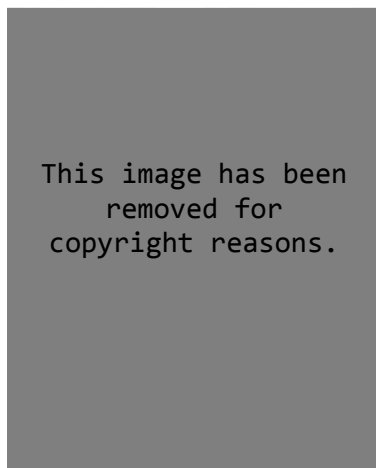


Figure 4. Tom of Finland, 1976, *Untitled (From 'Camping')*, Pen and ink on paper, 29.5x21cm. Los Angeles (David Kordansky Gallery).

¹¹ Guy Snaith, 'Tom's Men: The Masculinization of Homosexuality and the Homosexualization of Masculinity at the End of the Twentieth Century,' *Paragraph* 26, no. 1/2 (2003): 77-88.



Figure 5. Keani Rewha, 2024, *Cream Leather Interior*, Oil on canvas, 850x850mm.

Collaging is a compositional method (Figure 6); figures are glued onto rural landscapes; images are cut down to small, intimate moments. These compositions become influential for future drawings or paintings. *Thoroughfare* (Figure 7) is composed of personal and found imagery collaged to create this place that does not exist; the painted scene is the outcome of collage. The composition itself pictures an abandoned house that is inhabited by these two boys, strung out in an open field. The elongated road starts at the gaze of the viewer but leads to nowhere. Certain information is withheld to magnify the importance of the space (or house in particular) being subverted to fit the narrative of the figures who occupy it. In this instance, I operate outside the lines and have traced my own identity into the land. It has now been subverted to cater to the queer intimacy that I want to engage in within this space.

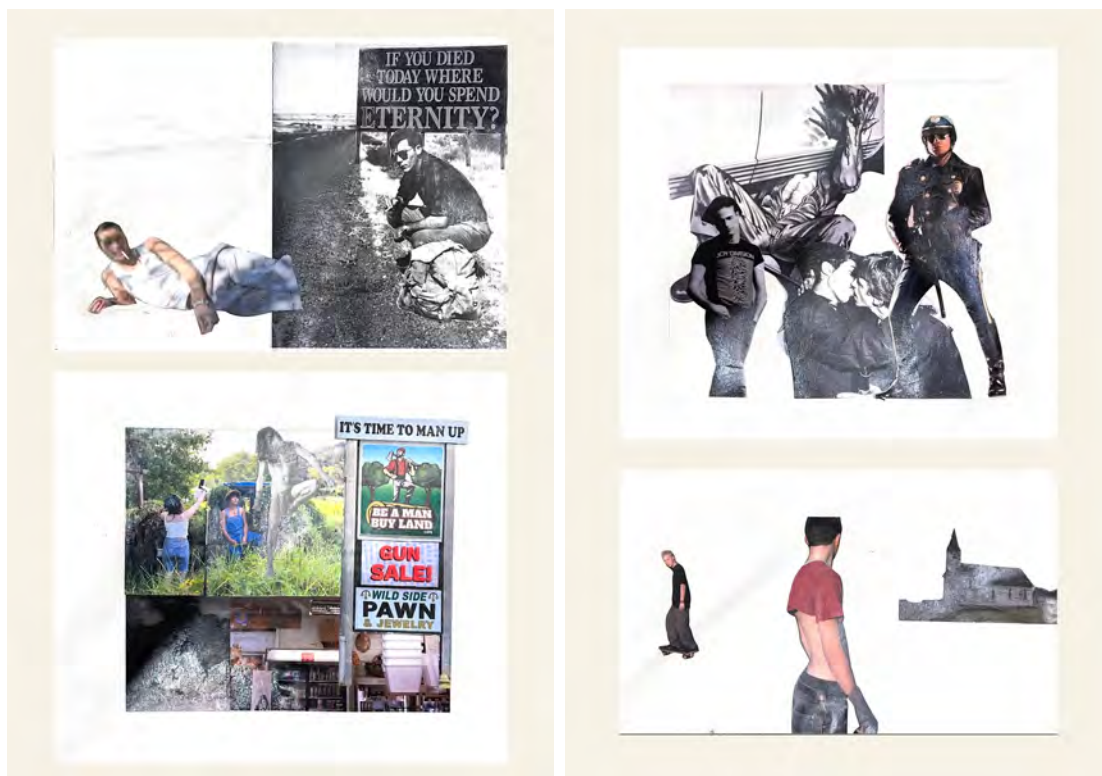


Figure 6. *Grid of collages*, 2024, Scan by Keani Rewha.



Figure 7. Keani Rewha, 2024, *Thoroughfare*, Oil on canvas, 1350x1050mm.

In *Bareback* (Figure 8) and *Kings of the Gas Station* (Figure 9), these boys are subverting an outdated archetype of masculinity by fully blanketing themselves in emotion and intimacy. They gaze into each other, feel each other's presence and support one another within the space they occupy. *Jealousy* (Figure 10) pictures figures positioned to feel each other through gaze. These compositions work to diminish the power structures of masculinity and allow the figures to all lay on a sense of vulnerability together within their secret sanctuaries. The rural could be understood as a constant retracing of Ahmed's 'lines' which confine identity to place,¹² where they become repeated over the years and no longer seem retraced but just stagnant in their nature. My paintings subvert these places by depicting queer intimacy, turning it into a sanctuary where queer bodies pursue their own intimate desires.

¹² Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*.



Figure 8. Keani Rewha, 2024, *Bareback*, Oil on canvas, 410 x 310 mm.



Figure 9. Keani Rewha, 2024, *Kings of the Gas Station*, Oil on canvas, 610 x 460 mm.



Figure 10. Keani Rewha, 2024, *Jealousy*, Oil on canvas, 610 x 910mm.

The Poetics of Delusion

Worlds That Never Were

I see delusion not as a false belief but as a way of coping and reshaping memory. Being queer in a small town meant constantly performing different versions of myself, which led me to delude myself about certain experiences to make them feel softer and more bearable. In my practice, delusion becomes a methodology not of distorting reality but of reframing it into something more tender and intimate.¹³ In my practice, delusion is when figures are moving, engaging in something; there's music and dialogue. If delusion is viewed with a negative connotation attached, then my practice is reframing it into a positive way of constructing narratives. I feel that delusion was a way for me to escape my reality of being surrounded by the heterosexual-ness of my high school and the small-town environment that I was being forced to enjoy.

To intertwine and 'delude' these personal narratives, I sequence images together. Sequencing as a method gathers narratives from sourced and personal imagery, piecing together parts of a story by laying them out on my studio walls (Figure 11). I analyse a sequence as a story unfolding through fragmented and framed scenes, creating a film strip narrative through images. Though similar to collaging, sequencing images on my studio walls works narratively (to understand a story); while collaging remains compositional, helping me understand the relationship between person and place.

The placement of images in sequence inspired film strip drawings (Figure 12), which placed singular images into one narrative. Until this point, I had understood my work as individual narratives. This sequential method of viewing images helped me understand these works as one story split into multiple.

¹³ I feel I have always been delusional; growing up in a small town where I was the only 'out' gay person, there was not much hope of these moments of intimacy or romance becoming a reality. Or if these moments did happen, they were normally made private, where the other party did not want anyone knowing about it. So, I would always envision myself in quiet, mundane moments of romance with other boys; I wanted that adolescent 'love' that all my other friends had.

Filmmaker Gregg Araki's film *Totally F***ed Up*¹⁴ is unconventional and fragmented, focusing on the lives of six alienated, queer teenagers living in Los Angeles. The film is broken up and informed by title cards that resemble a video diary (Figure 13). This fragmented style breaks the film into sections, giving viewers an understanding of which part of the narrative they are in. Similarly, I sequence paintings and drawings to collect fragmented parts of stories or memories into one singular narrative.

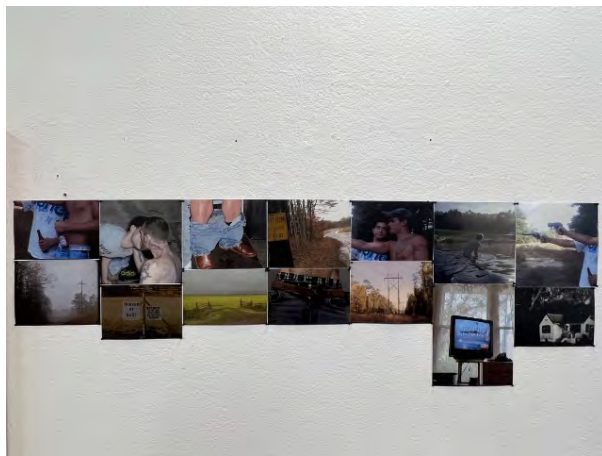


Figure 11. Images in sequence on my studio wall, 2025, Photo by Keani Rewha.



Figure 12. Keani Rewha, 2024, Sequential drawings, Graphite pencil on paper, scan by author.



Figure 13. Still from *Totally F***ed Up*, directed by Gregg Araki (1993). Courtesy of Strand Releasing.

¹⁴ *Totally F***ed Up*, written and directed by Gregg Araki (Los Angeles: Strand Releasing, 1993), film.

Using this sequential method to create narratives through image pairings helped me to be immersed in a state of delusion, acting as the figure who endured these experiences. This informed an idea of the viewer also acting as the figure, cascading through the installation to become immersed within the narrative.

In *Cruising Utopia*, queer theorist Jose Esteban Muñoz discusses the underscoring ideas of a queer utopia. Muñoz opens this discussion through the ideas of art historian and AIDS activist Douglas Crimp's discussion of a lost gay male lifeworld through the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Muñoz writes:

Crimp's writing stands as a testimony to a queer lifeworld in which the transformative potential of queer sex and public manifestations of such sexuality were both a respite from the abjection of homosexuality and a reformatting of that very abjection. The spaces and acts he lists represent signs, or ideals, that have been degraded and rendered abject within heteronormativity. Crimp's essay reclaims these terms, ideas, and remembrances and pushes them onto a list that includes such timeless values as fatherland and liberty. Crimp's essay thus bears witness to a queer sex utopia.¹⁵

Queer utopianism connects with my own term, 'delusion'. Queer bodies are so often subject to oppressive realities that we create our own utopia through community. Muñoz understands this through a sex utopia: queer men gather in bathhouses and cruising spots to act on sexual fantasies that, as a community, they have been robbed of due to the spread of HIV/AIDS. This notion of utopianism is crucial in the context of delusion. My delusion is built on the act of escapism; escaping from my oppressive realities; from heteronormativity; to places that nurture my queer identity.

Delusion contrasts and extends the physical realities through imaginative possibilities; these mundane rural spaces become larger than they present themselves as being. *The Queen* (Figure 14) by Pakistani painter Salman Toor frames a queer utopia where queer men subvert a traditional outdoor space into a sanctuary for queer expression.

¹⁵ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia, 10th Anniversary Edition: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 2nd ed. Sexual Cultures Ser, v. 50. (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 34.

Toor depicts queer bodies adorning one another, with two men embracing on the right and two central figures dressing the implied 'Queen'. I am interested in the closed fence, protecting these figures from whatever lurks outside. They are free from judgment, now able to indulge in their desires. Toor personifies this environment as the protector of these queer bodies. I employ Muñoz and Toor's understanding of a queer utopia within my reframing of the rural. Under heteronormative structures, a queer utopia becomes a delusion.

As well as expanding rural spaces, delusion can exaggerate a certain part of the narrative, allowing it to become more than what it is. This is not just two boys hanging out in a field but two secret lovers exploring the endless possibilities of these fields, inhabiting and reclaiming abandoned buildings, letting go of the heteronormative constraints that bind them to small town living. Delusion is made out of all things recollected, some purposely erased, and some exaggerated.

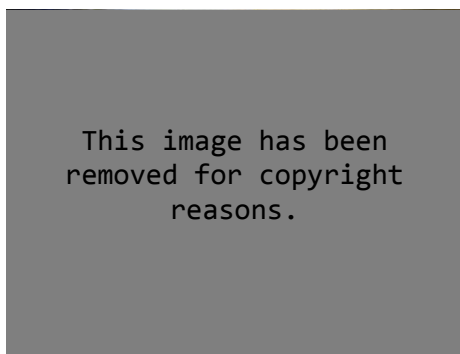


Figure 14. Salman Toor, 2019, *The Queen*, Oil on panel, 457 x 610 mm. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

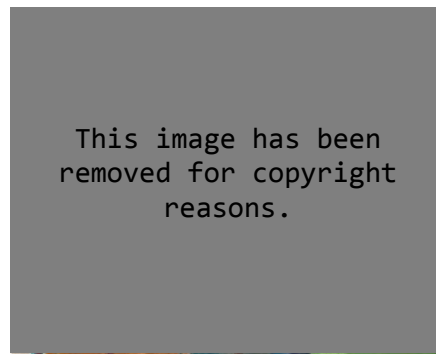


Figure 15. Nicole Eisenman, 2009, *Beer Garden with Ash/AK*, Oil on canvas, 1829 x 2235 mm. Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth.

In *Beer Garden with Ash/AK* (Figure 15), French-American artist Nicole Eisenman imbues figures at a beer garden with a sense of introspection, questioning the nature of human interaction. I am interested in the foregrounded figures. Two are immersed in intimacy, ignoring the viewer, while the looming protagonist's gaze is directed at the viewer. The central figure asserts dominance, shielding the others and allowing their interactions to unfold undisturbed by the viewer. Like the closed fence in Toor's *The Queen*, this main figure is the protector of all who inhabit this utopia disguised as a beer garden.

In my practice, I separate figures and locations onto different canvases to reveal their connection while preserving the secrecy of the space (keeping it safe). The two become separated but are bound together through narrative. *Outside the Rain, it's Only a Dream (I and II)* (Figures 17 and 18 - see page 26/27) are two works that separate figures and places from one another. The figures leave the place (location), in order to carve out a space for themselves to engage in intimacy. The road leads to nowhere - withholding their space to retain privacy but still offering a glimpse into a place they've inhabited.

The composition itself draws from filmmaker Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain*.¹⁶ I am interested in the compositional play of Jack and Ennis within this single shot - revealing the two inhabiting their campsite - juxtaposed with a single shot of the truck travelling across a long road. It revisits this idea of allowing a glimpse into their secret place, though the actual place is guarded through the choice of framing only the two who exist within it. In a digital collage (Figure 16), I have cropped and reframed two separate scenes to create a new narrative.

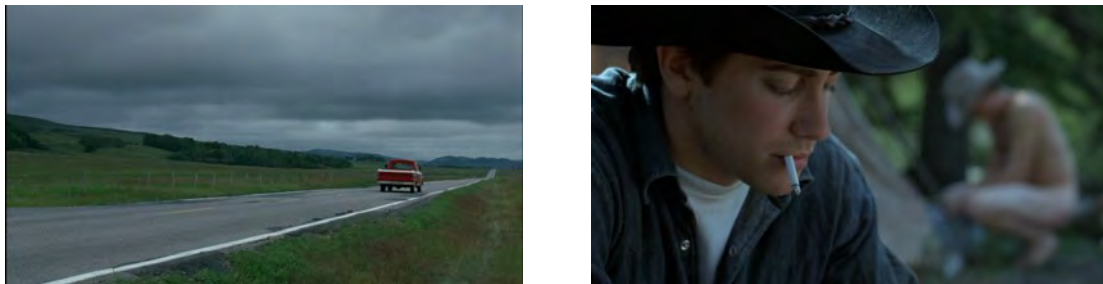


Figure 16. Film stills from *Brokeback Mountain*, directed by Ang Lee (Universal City, CA: Focus Features, 2005).

¹⁶ *Brokeback Mountain*, directed by Ang Lee (Universal City, CA: Focus Features, 2005), film.



Figure 17. Keani Rewha, 2024, *Outside the Rain it's Only a Dream (I)*, Oil on canvas.



Figure 18. Keani Rewha, 2024, *Outside the Rain it's Only a Dream (II)*, Oil on canvas.

Poems as Quiet Protest

Poet Richard Siken's *Crush* is a collection of prose poetry that uses intense emotional depth and vivid imagery to explore themes of love, desire, obsession, and loss within the context of gay relationships and queerness.¹⁷ In 'A Primer for the Small Weird Loves', Siken uses dark imagery to describe – what I understand as – relationships between men. He lists objects and actions to identify a scene occurring in '2:' a dark-haired man; your wrist; drinking Dutch beer from a green bottle; 'you tramp around a mustard-colored room in your underwear'; the detailed imagery encompasses our minds and invites us into this scene to experience the dynamic relationship between two people.

A dark-haired man in a rented bungalow is licking the whiskey
From the back of your wrist.
He feels nothing,
keeps a knife in his pocket,
peels an apple right in front of you
while you tramp around a mustard-colored room
in your underwear
drinking Dutch beer from a green bottle.
After everything that was going to happen has happened
you ask only for the cab fare home
and realize you should have asked for more
because he couldn't care less, either way.¹⁸

I understand poetry and writing as a merging of lived and unlived experiences; I have begun interweaving writing through my painting practice by magnifying a visual language that would otherwise be unspoken through my pictorial paintings. Writing, for me, is a way of understanding the senses and feelings of specific memories, as well as a way of understanding what would become a realised painting. In 2024, I began writing a series of poems as a response to missing home and missing certain people.

In *4:15* (Figure 19) and *The grass that itches my skin* (Figure 20), I replay memories of teenage life in the rural; my longing to get out of this town while also reflecting back from a new city about wanting to go back to its simplicity.

¹⁷ Richard Siken, *Crush*, The Yale Series of Younger Poets, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 99.

¹⁸ Siken, 'A Primer for the Small Weird Loves', 22.

Over time, I have understood how text sits within a practice that prioritises pictorial painting. Poetry is a language that visualises what I do not want to paint. The text becomes explicit in its description of events: *cold fingers caressing the dip in my spine; I don't like it when you enter me*. I have since experimented with shortening text and how a short description can offer a glimpse into a pictorial work. This sample of text (Figure 21) is the introduction to a scene that will then 'play out' on the following canvas. It offers a peek into what has or may happen with the following scene, allowing the audience to become participants in the narrative to imagine what would have happened.

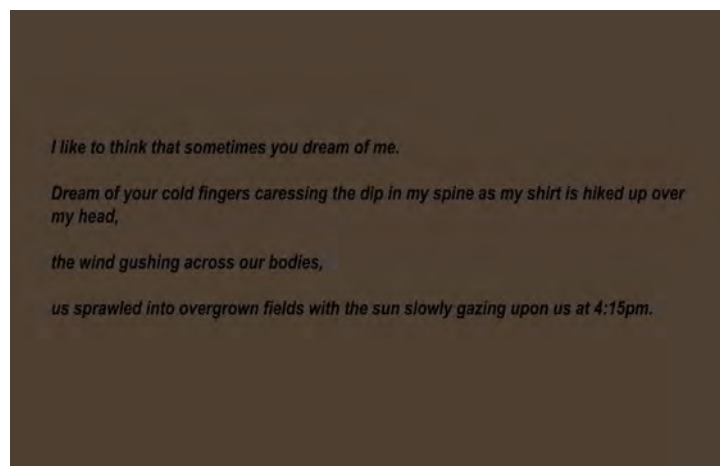


Figure 19. Keani Rewha, 2024, 4:15 (Text sample).



Figure 20. Keani Rewha, 2024, *The Grass That Itches My Skin* (Text sample).

AERATED SPIT THAT LINGERS
IN THE
PALM
OF MY
HAND

Figure 21. Keani Rewha, 2024, *Spit* (Text sample).

Signs of a Highway Dream

Four years old, I sat in the back of my father's 1995 Jeep Cherokee, aimlessly staring out the window, hoping to reach home now that our road trip was ending. The pastures of rural land form seas of green that sweep past as we speed through State Highway One. I register these signs as fractured stories of the rural landscape, for a road sign will remind me that home is near. Text as or in an image becomes its own voice in a narrative created through installation. Placed in between pictorial paintings the text paintings communicate an additional language to my pictorial works. I think about the positioning of text sitting next to or in my paintings. There are gaps between the narrative that flows through my paintings within an installation, and I understand how text can sit between these works to convey a literal narration of memory and experience. My practice is enhancing memory, where deluding the experience through writing exaggerates the narrative.

Brett De Thier's *Highway One*¹⁹ features an image titled *Kamo, Northland*,²⁰ featuring a dilapidated shed with 'Jesus is Lord' painted across the roof. De Thier's images of these phrases prompt me to question how we create our own narratives through journeys on the road. These phrases and signs with bold fonts link stories of religion, commercialisation, and ethical and political affairs together. This specific image allows me to question the decaying nature of the paint quality juxtaposed with the slowness of rural living.

4:15 (Figure 22) and *The Grass that Itches My Skin* (Figure 23), two text paintings of mine, outline explicit themes within an experience. Painted text stands in place for what is not visualised through figures, landscapes, or objects, allowing the viewer to imagine the wider scene of an explicit encounter.

¹⁹ A photo essay book of photographs taken while travelling State Highway One, Brett De Thier, *Highway One* (Sydney: Random House Australia, 1999).

²⁰ This specific image is of a place from my hometown (Whangarei).

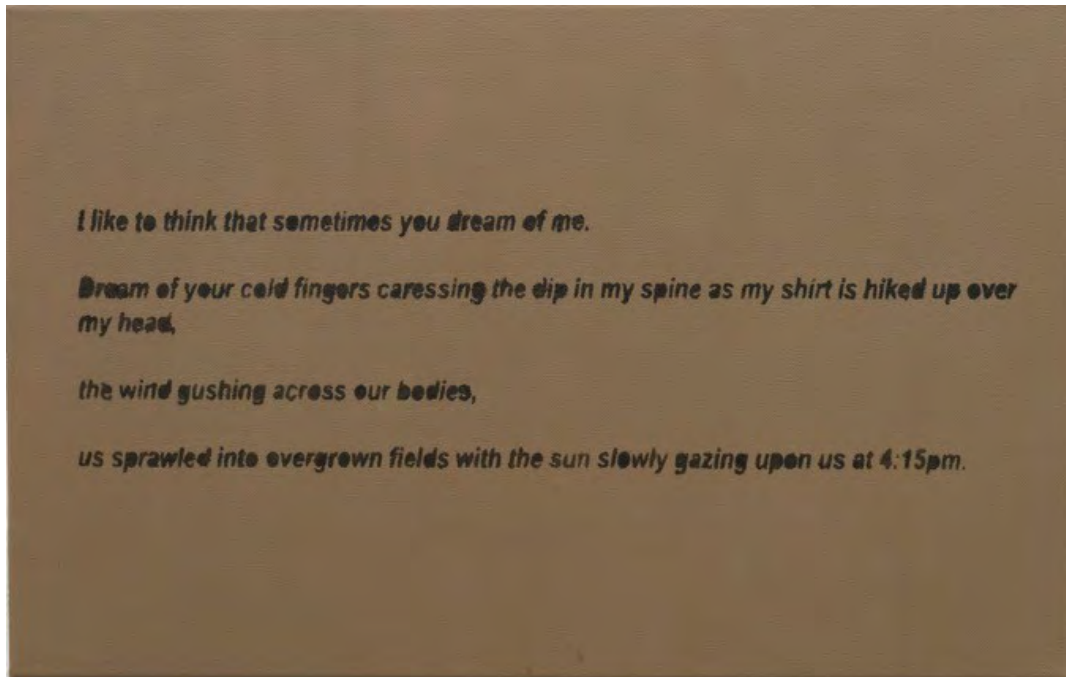


Figure 22. Keani Rewha, 2024, 4:15, Acrylic on canvas, 550 x 350 mm.



Figure 23. Keani Rewha, 2024, *The Grass That Itches My Skin*, Acrylic on canvas, 550 x 350 mm.

To better understand creating narratives, I began writing to explore the sensory elements of scenes – smells, sounds, movements, and textures. These ideas of sensation evolved into poetry. I began to see text not just as a language but as an image – a way of communicating what I do not want to be visualised through figures. The work *4:15* details a remembrance of an explicit encounter. The words ‘dream of me... Dream of your...’ identify two voices exchanged in this experience. Listing identifies place and action: cold fingers, dip in my spine, shirt hiked, overgrown field; and *4:15 pm* specifies the time this experience took place. Text lets me be sexual without visualising it fully. The viewer has the freedom to imagine the scene. *The Grass That Itches My Skin* similarly lists details: Lou Reed CD, your truck. Both works ground the viewer in this secret sanctuary as if they are engaging in intimacy.



Figure 24. Ed Ruscha, 2006, *Public Market*, Acrylic on canvas, 508 x 1016 mm. Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian Gallery.



Figure 25. Ed Ruscha, 1962, *Gas*, Oil, ink, and pencil on canvas, 1270 x 1270 mm. Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian Gallery.

Writer Liv Goodbody discusses American artist Ed Ruscha’s text work, stating that ‘[...] by isolating and elevating the language of consumer culture, he invites viewers to reconsider the words that permeate their daily lives, revealing the latent meanings and cultural significance embedded within them’.²¹ In *Public Market* (Figure 24) and *Gas* (Figure 25), Ruscha reduce these once commercial words to mundane phrases. We understand their familiarity but question the bare placement on paper in black and white ink.

²¹ Liv Goodbody, ‘Ed Ruscha’s Play with Typography: Transforming Words into Art, MyArtBroker (website), November 22, 2024. <https://www.myartbroker.com/artist-ed-ruscha/articles/ed-ruscha-play-with-typography>. Under the section ‘Use of Commercial Signage and Advertising’.

My works utilise Arial Normal font (bold and italic) to mimic the Highway Gothic font commonly used on road signs. This choice is rooted in shifting the narrative of the rural: in reframing road signs I am utilising a common rural motif and reframing it to tell my stories of queer intimacy.

Artist and writer Natasha Matalia-Smith's exhibition *In the Flesh* (Figure 26) uses text to explore intimacy and lust. A singular pink text piece is framed and set apart. It contrasts with jagged, fragmented wall text that feels like a message lost in translation. The separation suggests a shift from emotional clarity to confusion – the framed text becomes a direct plea for intimacy. Similarly, in *Spit* (Figure 27), I explore how text and image interact. The phrase 'Aerated spit in the palm of my hand' shares a surface with figuration, hinting at what the acrylic wash layer conceals. Open hands suggest a moment of intimacy, anchoring the text to a specific image. When text stands apart from the pictorial, it becomes its own scene.



Figure 26. Natasha Matila-Smith, 2017, *In The Flesh*. Installation view at Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Dunedin, New Zealand. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 27. Keani Rewha, 2025, *Spit*, Oil on canvas, 1350 x 1050 mm.

Objects of Silence

Language of Colour

In some instances, I feel that my colour blindness coincides with my queerness. My identity as a gay man has always been something I have grappled with. At age four, I experienced the word faggot for the first time – I wore a pair of sandals to kindergarten that featured a small heel; I remember feeling ecstatic at the idea of these shoes, only to be pushed into a sandpit by a much larger boy and told ‘only faggots wear high heels’. This experience of sticking out like a sore thumb haunted me all through my adolescent schooling years. I have always felt that I am front and centre of a play that everyone wants to view, but no one else wants to be a part of. It was made clear that I was the faggot each time, and everyone else had come to view my performance; at these moments, I could visualise the colour red as the blood rushed to the tip of my eyeballs and the blue of my breath as it grew to shake. At times I would allow a green ocean of over-grown grass to swallow me as I gazed towards the blue blanket of sky, pleading towards an invisible being, questioning why nobody else deserved the title of faggot like I did?

Like colour, my flamboyancy is something I have never been able to register in myself, but for some reason, everyone else is able to see it. In *Chroma*, filmmaker and writer Derek Jarman recalls his relationships with colours. He discusses recollections of blue in relation to experiences: a cyclist almost crashes into him, causing Jarman to ‘... step into a blue funk’.²² Jarman further relates blue to his HIV-positive status – his blinded eyes only allow him to see blue, also visualised in his film *Blue* (Figure 28).²³

²² Derek Jarman, *Chroma: A Book of CoLour; June '93*, (London: Vintage, 1995), 107.

²³ *Blue*, directed by Derek Jarman (Basilisk Communications Ltd., 1993), single-channel video, 79 min.



Figure 28. Still from *Blue*, directed by Derek Jarman, (Basilisk Communications Ltd, 1993). Single-channel video with sound, 79 min. Courtesy of the Estate of Derek Jarman and LUMA Foundation.

‘Into the Blue’ is a chapter that discusses his relation to the colour blue, a colour which has previously caused conflict in my life. As I reflect, I feel the anxiety of a young boy being quizzed by the other boys as to why he cannot throw a ball like they can. Does being a boy make you blue? I think of my disgust towards the blue uniform of my high school – the light refractions of a blue sky entering the classroom as I bent over in my blue shorts to pick up my pencil, only to catch a glimpse of a boy glaring at my body. Did this make me the blue version of Elle Woods?

I have since revisited the colour blue. Jarman states that ‘Blue is darkness made visible’,²⁴ and I have come to realise that my darkness is associated with blue. In *Thoroughfare* (Figure 7 - see page 16), the darkness of nighttime is conveyed through tonal ranges of blue, as are the confronting memories that flood in when I think of my life in adolescence. The moonlight blankets the composition in blue, where darkness becomes so dark that I register the blue within.

Jarman manifests blue into a living being, exclaiming, ‘Blue stretches, yawns, and is awake’.²⁵ In *Outside the Rain it’s Only a Dream (II)* (Figure 18 - see page 27), Blue embraced me in his arms, naked, in the back of his car while we gazed into the blue field at dusk.

²⁴ Jarman, *Chroma*, 115.

²⁵ Jarman, *Chroma*, 111.

Blue ignored me in shame before our high school peers but embraced me publicly two years later, free from the heteronormative constraints of the high school. In *Stitched* (Figure 31), I stare at Blue's back, longing for him to turn around and register my existence behind him. He is preoccupied, not willing to register that he has come to love what he previously despised. In a sense, I register blue with a sense of privacy and hostility because of these memories. Ironically, I feel in my subconscious that blue is registered to men because of these experiences that I reflect on.

My experience of queerness has existed as a confrontational aspect of my lived experience, as well as my relationship with colour. Both seek to challenge my existence and how I perceive the world. The intentional use of non-confrontational colours serves as a pivotal strategy in my exploration of queer representation within my work.

The colours I consider 'nonconfrontational' are muted hues made of yellow ochre, magenta, burnt umber, and indigo. For me, these colours and their limited tonal range bring warmth to my paintings and are associated with recollections of intimacy and softness. This association includes the treatment of the colour on the surface. The colour red for me works to suggest a sexual encounter, even though the framing of a scene does not show one happening.



Figure 29. Wong Kar-wai, *In the Mood for Love* (2000). Cinematography by Christopher Doyle and Mark Lee Ping-Bing. Timesta.

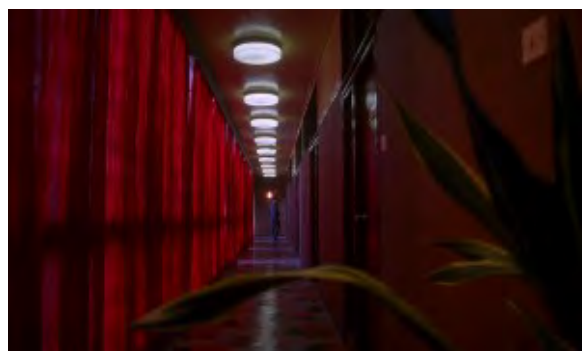


Figure 30. Wong Kar-wai, *In the Mood for Love* (2000). Cinematography by Christopher Doyle and Mark Lee Ping-Bing. Timesta.

Wong Kar-Wai's film *In the Mood for Love*²⁶ is a seductive depiction of two characters engaging in a secret relationship, where the colour red is used as a tool to suggest intimacy and sexual encounters. Whilst the film is romantically and sexually charged, we do not see the subjects engage in any form of intimacy.

²⁶ *In the Mood for Love*, directed by Wong Kar-wai (Hong Kong: Block 2 Pictures, 2000), film, 98 min.

Red allows us to recognise the moments of intimacy, acting as markers that guide us through their relationship (Figures 29 and 30). My painting *Boxers* (Figure 32), pictures someone sprawled out with a hand caressing the crotch of another person. Soft red tones form the bodies of the two subjects. The work is not overtly sexual. There are no faces, no way to identify the figures. We are drawn to the idea of these two engaging in a sexual encounter. The work's composition is closely cropped, and the chromatic range is limited to a dull red, focusing on the caress of the hand on the thigh and uses red to mark the heat of sex.

Similar to Kar-Wai, red in my work becomes a marker for the sensation of touch between bodies, rather than a literal depiction of sex. This use of red expands into other colours that signal sensory elements of intimacy. From here, I begin to approach colour itself as a sensation – most notably as a way to convey heat.



Figure 31. Keani Rewha, 2024, *Stitched*, Oil on denim, 250 x 250 mm.



Figure 32. Keani Rewha, 2024, Boxers, Oil on linen, 450 x 400 mm.

In *Cream Leather Interior* (Figure 5 – see page 14), I work primarily with raw umber and yellow ochre to evoke a sense of warmth and intimacy. I feel the yellow reflecting, like sun rays absorbed into the skin. The burnt brown is dry, tanned skin on a summer's afternoon. I can smell the sweat that is shared as two bodies embrace. In *Untitled* (Figure 33), artist Travis MacDonald allows warm yellows to form a scene that translates as a sunny day's heat. The work is coated in a yellow wash, with subtle brown tones shaping a foregrounded figure and a house in the back. I understand MacDonald's monochromatic colours as marking a time when the sun is glazing the land. The monochrome composition immerses you in the heat.

Artist and author Alex Foxtan uses a diptych to split narrative through colour, figure, and action. In *Scene* (Figure 34), the left figure cowers in warm, soft tones, while the right figure, painted in dark blue and pink tones, raises a whip. I see Foxtan's use of colour as a play on dominance and submission. The right figure asserts control, his cool palette suggesting an intent to inflict pain or pleasure. Here, colour becomes a marker of power. By cropping and limiting the chroma to low, muted tones I preserve their intimate nature, to not objectify their bodies. Colour, in this context, acts as a mediator – softening, humanising, and re-centring the narrative around relational and emotional aspects of queer experiences. This approach is deeply rooted in my lived experiences and subconscious responses to how queer bodies are represented and perceived. My work seeks to challenge the pervasive objectification of queer bodies, a phenomenon I have personally encountered. By reframing these bodies within my paintings, I resist perpetuating the same objectifying gaze, instead presenting them with agency and dignity.



Figure 33. Travis MacDonald, 2024, *Untitled*, Ink, watercolour, glue and oil on silk 700 x 560 mm. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 34. Alex Foxtan, 2024, *Scene*, Oil on canvas, 550 x 845 mm. (Diptych). Courtesy of the artist.

Framing The Invisible

When I was sixteen years old, I took a picture of my body. I stood trying to capture everything but my face within the image. I am now left with images of a waist – a repetition of shapes that have formed together to create the silhouette of a torso. They are cropped ultimately to erase identification, to control a narrative that I am nothing but a slim, smooth-skinned torso, ready for viewing. Framing and cropping have become a method in my practice: I observe a body or object, minimise it down to simple moments of touch, movement, or positioning, and paint it within a framed scene. I create intimacy by removing details that question the identity of figures; I zoom in to frame a moment of touch, focusing only on the torso of a body. In *untitled (study)* (Figure 35), the nameless torsos of two boys are framed in the foreground of a scene, and we focus on them as they follow each other to or from a location. The key components of this scene – the outdoors, the fence bars, and the bodies – identify a time and place with a moment occurring between the two figures, yet we cannot identify who they are. The yellow of the hot sun glistens off their bodies as they hike their shorts up, fleeing from their place of secrecy.

Anthony Cudahy's painting *Some Vision (Ian and Alex)* (Figure 36) depicts two men stationed in a bay window. As one figure caresses the other positioning themselves in their home, the warm light glares at them. The positioning of the hands, mixed with the warm colours of the skin, translates to a sense of tenderness and the vulnerability between the two figures. Their location positions them within a private space, though the window communicates a public view where people can survey them while their backs are turned. A conversation is created between the positioning of the figures – one caressing the other, standing behind him, acting as a shield – and the warmth of the lighting highlighting their bodies.

I reflect on the image of my body in the mirror; the way the light would heat the side of my body as I tensed my core to seem more toned. The intimacy created through an image-sharing app – his body wirelessly pressed against mine, just as Cudahy's figures are pressed against one another.



Figure 35. Keani Rewha, 2024, *Untitled (study)*,
Oil on linen, 200 x 200 mm.

I question if it is necessary to understand everything that has not materialised within a frame? In my practice, I understand the invisible not as moments outside of the frame but more as moments re-contextualised through framing. In her oil painting *Gun with Hand #1* (Figure 37), Vija Celmins depicts an isolated hand firing a revolver, with smoke suggesting recent action. The framing transforms the gun into an extension of the body, highlighting its intimacy with the hand. Cropped and minimal, the work emphasises the relationship between object and person, exploring themes of intimacy, control, and action. In *Cream Leather Interior* (Figure 5 - see page 14), a leg is positioned in the foreground, with a torso posed sideways in the background. The scene is cropped to suggest intimacy occurring, but it does not allow us to see the full, explicit moment. The explicit nature of the scene is recontextualised by framing, hiding from the audience the full sexual exchange between the two characters. The viewer is invited to imagine - to participate in the encounter - while still being denied full access to it.



Figure 36. Anthony Cudahy, *Some Vision (Ian and Alex)*, 2023, oil on canvas, 1820 x 1830 x 32 mm, image courtesy of artist and Grimm Gallery. Photography by GC Photography.



Figure 37. Vija Celmins, 1964, *Gun with Hand #1*, Oil on canvas, 622 x 876 mm, © Vija Celmins, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.



Figure 38. Keani Rewha, 2024, *Caress me so gently*,
Oil on linen, 210 x 210 mm.

In *Caress Me So Gently* (Figure 38), the crossed guns suggest an act of intimacy. Framing and chromatic cropping disrupt notions of sexual aggression. I seek to elicit an emotional resonance through these objects, imbuing them with a sense of intimacy and affective depth. It is just the guns existing in this world. The obscured model of the gun gives it a sense of anonymity, as if it is standing in place for the two figures' private intimacy. Celmins has taken the firing of a gun to a place of charged intimacy, but my work has a queer subtext that hers does not. When installed sequentially, the guns are reframed through a queer lens to understand notions of private intimacy.

Furthermore, framing as a method extends to my understanding of narrative between person and place in the rural. In *Gothic NZ: The Darker Side of Kiwi Culture*, writer Martin Edmond discusses transforming the mundane into resplendence in relation to Philip Clairmont's paintings. Edmond discusses the transformation of the abandoned house through imagination, explaining that 'Abandoned houses are a primary material for the imagination because there we may restore to existence something which has been lost'.²⁷ In reflecting on moments of my hometown, I have come to see how rural environments frame specific moments – held within endless grass, between fence posts, or an abandoned house. Philip Clairmont's painting understands that '[...] a house is a repository for the emotions of those who live there. Objects are stained by residues of human presence even after those people have passed on, perhaps to other houses, perhaps into death'.²⁸ The abandoned houses featured in *Thoroughfare* (Figure 7 – see page 16) and *Jealousy* (Figure 10 – see page 20) are reframed through the remembrance of existing in that space at a point in time. The buildings sit nestled in between the surrounding environment, framed by the emptiness of the rural. The memories embedded within these houses are what keep them alive through these paintings.

In *Christina's World* (Figure 39) American artist Andrew Wyeth understands the framing of a house through memory and experience. The framing creates an isolated universe; the figure lies within this self-contained world on pastures that separate her from home, though she reaches toward it on the right side of the painting.

²⁷ Martin Edmond, 'The Abandoned House as a Refuge for Imagination', in *Gothic NZ: The Darker Side of Kiwi Culture*, ed. Laurence Simmons and Heather Worth (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2006), 30.

²⁸ Edmond, 'The Abandoned House', 30.

However, I am interested in the shed in the middle of the painting. The familiar reframed to become unfamiliar – the empty shed in the middle, disregarded. These forgotten buildings are foundations for discovering secret sanctuaries; their past owners disregard them, so I now forge my figures to inhabit them.

Wyeth depicts the home as an extension of self; the house and person are one and the same, ultimately both reflections of each other. Art historian Randall C. Griffin writes, ‘Wyeth believed that houses can blur the boundary between self and world. Of the Olsons, he said, “If you lifted them [Christina and her brother] out bodily and set them down in a room in New York, it would be like looking at that house [in Cushing, Maine]”’.²⁹ In *Christina Olson* (Figure 40), the figure contrasts with the home – the shadows fuse them together, and the separation begins with her gaze out of the door. In *Christina's World*, the figure is separate from the home. However, the positioning of her body suggests she is bound to her home; it is calling her back.

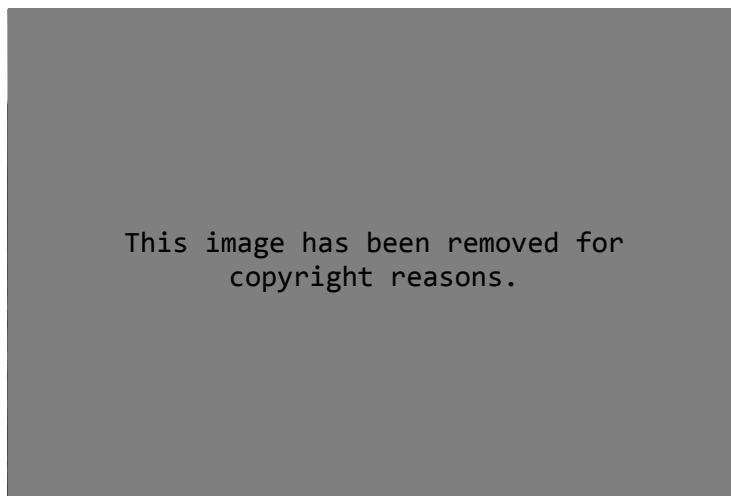


Figure 39. Andrew Wyeth, 1948, *Christina's World*, Tempera on panel, 813 × 1219 mm. Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York. 2025 Andrew Wyeth/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

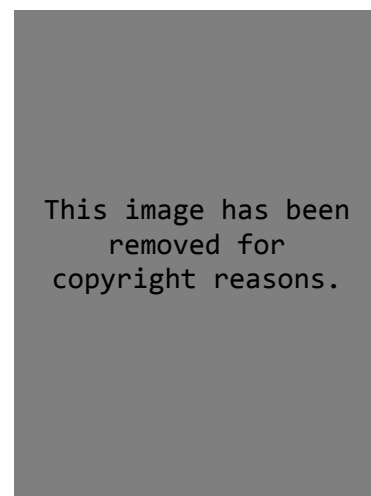


Figure 40. Andrew Wyeth, 1947, *Christina Olson*, Tempera on panel, 457 × 559 mm. Collection of the Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, Maine. 2025 Andrew Wyeth/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

²⁹ Randall C. Griffin, ‘Andrew Wyeth’s *Christina's World*: Normalizing the Abnormal Body.’ *American Art* 24, no. 2 (2010): 30–49. <https://doi.org/10.1086/656458>, 38.

Details of *Thoroughfare* (Figure 41) and *Jealousy* (Figure 42) depict the notion of the house as a representation of self. The house is built from the foundations of all that I feel and know. *Thoroughfare* pictures the window frame, offering a glimpse into the boy's secret sanctuary. The structure is understood through my recollection of place and experience, which becomes framed into one scene, just as it is in *Jealousy*. *My sleepless solitude* (Figure 43) offers a gaze outside a window. These framing choices posit that the figure and house are bound as one, the gaze suggesting a longing for something. In this work, the viewer is positioned as the figure - we are the ones gazing through this window, familiarising ourselves with this place and registering our experiences within it to understand it.



Figure 41. Details of *Thoroughfare*, Keani Rewha, 2024.



Figure 42. Details of *Jealousy*, Keani Rewha, 2024.



Figure 43. Keani Rewha, 2024, *My sleepless solitude*, Oil on canvas, 950 x 1050 mm.

Conclusion

Throughout this practice-led research, I have developed a painting practice that uses narrative and delusion as methodologies to communicate stories of queer intimacy within the rural landscape. Through listing, drawing, collaging, and sequencing, I have explored how queerness can reimagine both the aesthetics of masculinity and the perception of rural space.

By cultivating delusion as a methodological tool, I move beyond the negativity that I associate with my queer existence, generating alternative forms of understanding and inhabiting rural environments. This process allows me to construct a version of rural space that aligns with my queer identity – one where masculinity and femininity are not opposing forces, but coexist fluidly. My queerness does not negate masculinity; instead, it reshapes it. Reclaiming masculinity through aesthetic strategies enables me to represent the paradoxical tension and harmony between queerness and masculinity.

Delusion further allows me to explore the distortion of memory, transforming exclusion into imagined inclusion. In retrospect, I realise I have always employed delusion to visualise myself in spaces that once excluded me. Delusion does not erase past realities but elevates them, infusing them with new, generative meanings.

My painting practice navigates the threshold between the familiar and the fictional, the visible and the withheld, where new queer narratives emerge in resistance to and within the rural imaginary. Methods such as chromatic cropping and poetic language help preserve a sense of tenderness while resisting objectification, inviting viewers into an experience both deeply personal and expansively queer.

Ultimately, this work does not seek to resolve the oppression of queer bodies in rural contexts. Instead, it holds space for ambiguity, mundanity, and the gentle complexity of queer intimacy. Through storytelling and aesthetic intervention, I reclaim the landscapes that once made me feel isolated, subverting the rural through queer subtext and the imaginative transformation which is ultimately a delusion.

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Appendix

The Grass That Itches My Skin Exhibition Documentation

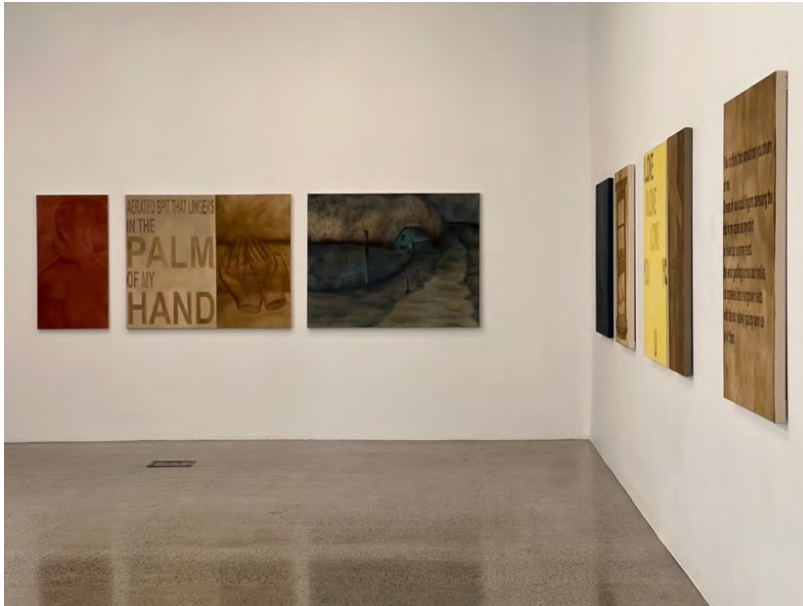


Figure 1. Keani Rewha, *The Grass That Itches My Skin* installation 1, 2025, Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery, photo courtesy of Paul Chapman.



Figure 2. Keani Rewha, *The Grass That Itches My Skin* installation 2, 2025, Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery, photo courtesy of Monique Redmond.



Figure 3. Keani Rewha, *The Grass That Itches My Skin* installation 3, 2025, Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery, photo courtesy of Paul Chapman.



Figure 4. Keani Rewha, *The Grass That Itches My Skin* installation 4, 2025, Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery, photo courtesy of Paul Chapman.



Figure 5. Keani Rewha, *The Grass That Itches My Skin* installation 5, 2025, Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery.



Figure 6. Keani Rewha, *The Grass That Itches My Skin* installation 6, 2025, Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery.



Figure 7. Keani Rewha, *The Grass That Itches My Skin* installation 7, 2025, Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery, photo courtesy of Paul Chapman.



Figure 8. Keani Rewha, *The Grass That Itches My Skin* installation 8, 2025, Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery, photo courtesy of Paul Chapman.



Figure 9. Keani Rewha, *Father Figure*, 2025, oil on denim, 1050 x 1050 mm.



Figure 10. Keani Rewha, *The past is in front of me like the headlights of a drunk driver*, 2025, oil on canvas, 1050 x 1050 mm.

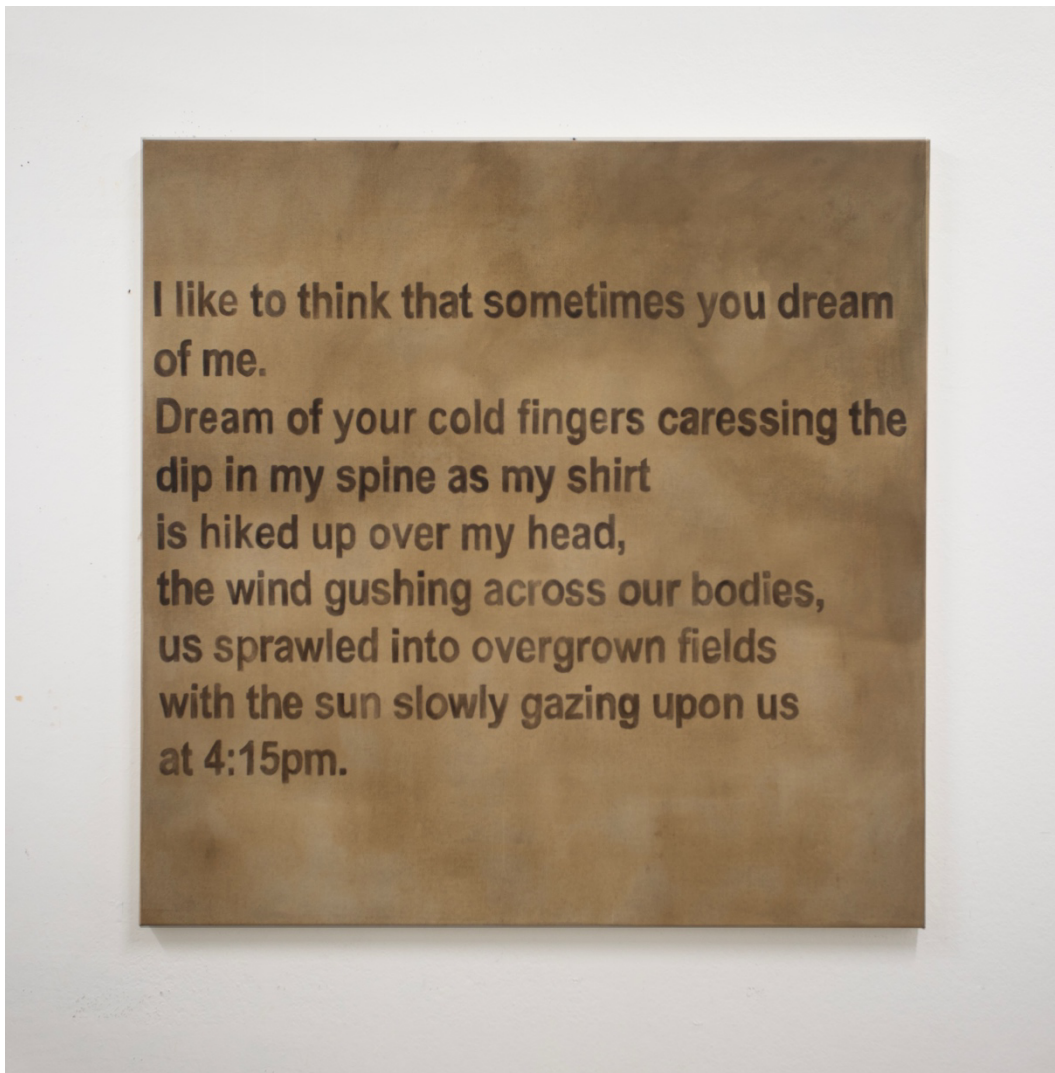


Figure 11. Keani Rewha, *4:15 Forever*, 2025, oil on canvas, 1050 x 1050 mm.



The Grass That Itches My Skin

Titles (L-R)

Kiss of Life, 2025, oil on canvas,
550 x 1050mm

Spit, 2025, oil on canvas, 1300 x 1050mm

Thoroughfare, 2024, oil on canvas,
1350 x 1050mm

Father Figure, 2025, oil on denim,
1050 x 1050mm

My Sleepless Solitude, 2024, oil on canvas,
950 x 1050mm

The past is in front of me like the headlights of a drunk driver,
2025, oil on canvas, 1050 x 1050mm

Dirt Pits, 2025, oil on linen, 550 x 1050mm

4:15 forever, 2025, oil on canvas,
1050 x 1050mm

Image:

Spit (Left) and *Thoroughfare* (Right), 2024-2025,
oil on canvas, Canvas 1: 1300 x 1050 mm;
Canvas 2: 1350 x 1050 mm.

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Figure 12. Keani Rewha, *The Grass That Itches My Skin* ephemera, 2025.