

All the Ways I Tried to Reach You

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ABSTRACT

All the Ways I Tried to Reach You is a practice-led research project focused on giving a visual life to an invisible horizon – that of the internal subjective experience. This is a veiled space between the Self and the Other. To define the visual terrain of this indeterminate space, I use an object-based installation practice that is responsive to the affective qualities of materials, objects, and arrangements. The practice is initiated using processes and materials whereby making brings form into existence rather than form driving the making. It is progressed through my being attuned to how objects and materials articulate the invisible as entangled assemblages. This exploration involves various processes like painting, felting, papermaking, stitching, assembling, disassembling, and reassembling. The materials used are both found and ready-made, such as paint, wool, paper, wood, tarpaulins, and Hi-Viz vests. The installation encounter aims to signal the *there-ness* of multiple inner worlds (artist and viewer) and to tug at underused senses to bring a presence to this *gap* between Self–Other.

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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 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.

Signed:

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INTRODUCTION

Through an object-based installation practice, this project explores the peripheries of the Self in the face of the Other (another person). By this statement, I mean the intuitive sensing of understanding the Other beyond what meets the eye. I identify this sensing as *corner-of-my-eye-research* of the Other. I investigate the visual qualities that I associate with this process, such as gaps, layers, and edges and employ them as visual strategies (see Fig.1). Objects and materials— found and made, provisional and laboured—are used in adaptable assemblages to visually signal the phenomenon that my imaginings of the Other (namely their inner experience) will always be exceeded. For this enquiry, I am calling this phenomenon ‘more-than...’,¹ an abbreviated, yet conceptually expanded version of *more than meets the eye*.



Figure 1.N. Donald. Work in progress details (April 2023). Observing layers, edges, and frills. Materials: Woollen felt, tarpaulin and Hi-Viz vest and raincoat parts.

Orbiting around the notion of more than meets the eye is the question: How do I *know* you? I emphasise the word *know* because I am referring to a sensed knowing of internal, subjective experiences other than my own. I imagine this knowledge is acquired iteratively and intuitively, with insights of the Other emerging in glimpses, and sideways glances, to which I attempt to give visual life in this project.

This ‘more-than...’ is akin to *Infinity*,² as described by Emmanuel Lévinas. Infinity, as I understand it, encompasses what we see and more. For me, the ‘more-than...’ is something that is sensed yet not seen, creating an invisible space between the Self and the Other. I imagine this indeterminate space to be defined by what gathers at its edge—a horizon littered with indirect signals.

¹ I will use this format of ‘more-than...’ throughout the exegesis, which I abbreviate and add an ellipsis as a visual cue to indicate possibility and potential.

² Emmanuel Lévinas, "*Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*" (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

Throughout this practice-led enquiry, I endeavour to signal to and play within this space, which I call the *gap*. The visual manifestations of this idea and the logic behind it will unfold in this exegesis. For this project, I intend to let go of preconceived ideas of how things would visually manifest and identify the visual parameters, by *cooperating* with materials and processes as a *co-agent* and working with the hunch that the art encounter functions as an interface between inner, subjective experiences.

This exegesis is written in three sections. Section 1 frames my methodology, methods, and conceptual interests and section 2 details material and visual strategies that I engaged to serve my enquiry. Section 3 surveys the discoveries and visual developments that unfolded in the first quarter of 2023. The following is a synopsis outlining each section.

Section 1, part 1 of my discussion, I explain how I approach the process of making. Through engagement with methods, materials, and the practice of assembling, visual ideas arise in a processual, emergent way. The elements involved in making establish a network of affected and affecting agents, out of which arose a system that I've called *one-thing-leads-to-another*. This system plays a vital role in exploring the conceptual and visual terrain. Part 2 surveys my movement from a painting practice to an installation practice, where assembling and reassembling installation objects reveals the collective affective agency of images and objects, being entangled in *more-ways-than-one*.³ I'll touch on the presence of the maker and viewer as part of this entanglement (Self and Other), creating an *agencement* as described by sociologists Silvia Gherardi and Michela Cozza. In part 3 I introduce *Infinity*, Emmanuel Lévinas' concept of the Other as overflowing, which I found useful in thinking about 'more-than...'. I discuss how I've adopted Levinas' concept of *Infinity* to align with my idea of 'more-than...'.³

Section 2 concerns the materials, objects, and images as they signify the 'more-than...' within the work. This starts by introducing my strategy of making the identification of objects, and images *just out of reach*. By affecting signifying properties of materials, objects become ambiguous. For this project, I refer to this ambiguity as *peculiar*. As part of the *agencement*, part 2 delves into materials in detail. My investigation will explore how the qualities of material can either adhere to or disrupt semiotic relations to implicate *something-to-see-here*. Part 3 describes other visual strategies that bring attention to the edges and subtle spaces of my objects and assemblages. These strategies are in place to decenter looking—a way to prompt more-than-meets-the-eye. This includes foregrounding elements, such as gaps, layers, edges, and frills (see Fig.2).

³ In *more-ways-than-one* is repeated throughout this exegesis to reiterate the idea that things (objects in my project, the self, and the other) continuously possess the potential to present in multiple ways, which is an expression of 'more-than...'.³



Figure 2. N. Donald. Studio assemblages (2022-23). Experiments with frills, gaps, layers, and edges. Left to right: *Felt Bolster* with a frill; *Felt Bolster* with *Green Portrait*, *HERE* felt mat and 4x2 wooden hyphen. Material: Woollen felt, paper, wood, tarpaulin, Hi-Viz vest and raincoat parts, acrylic painting in repurposed frame.

In section 3, part 1 I introduce what I have called hyphen-objects. These sculptural objects and their arrangements seek to operate as a discursive invitation to discourse in collective meaning-making, in ways other than verbal. This culminates in a discussion about *play* in section 3, part 2. I define how I see play operating as an agent of amenability, reaching across to the Other with art as the hyphen-object between. I reflect on the importance of playfulness in evoking a sense of amenability, on installation as a research tool, and how my practice aims to be open and attuned to a matrix of elements, to allow for an emergent understanding of the invisible.

The story that follows contains two personal accounts of experiencing an invisible gap between my mother and me—not making my mother unapproachable, but rather full of a potential and ‘more-than...’. These are just two moments of many, that have influenced an attunement to this phenomenon throughout my life.

Lying on the bedroom floor in a 1970s Mangere brick and tile house, I watched the dust settle in a shaft of light. My senses were attuned to suburban weekend sounds and the smell of Mum’s baking, which aroused a soft attentive yet dreamy alertness. At that moment, I experienced the bounds of my skin and a peculiar, yet not uncomfortable aloneness. I became aware that I could explore my inner world but not that of others. With that thought came the realization: I did not really *know* my mother, or anyone else, for that matter.

Twenty years later, on a sun-drenched veranda in Glen Eden, I sat next to my mother in conversation, filing dry skin from my cracked heels. A breeze caught a cloud of my skin dust, causing it to settle on my mother’s lap. I apologised, expecting her to complain, but she calmly responded, “That skin came from me. You are me and I am you.” She accepted the dust as a moment of communion with me—an experience beyond the prosaic. In a fleeting moment, with unspoken gestures, we signalled to one another in recognition that we are at once connected and yet separate.

In closing, I turn to Merleau-Ponty's discussion of Husserl and the horizon:

When Husserl spoke of the horizon of the things—of their exterior horizon, which everybody knows, and their “interior horizons,” that darkness stuffed with visibility of which their surface is but the limit—it is necessary to take the term seriously. No more than are the sky or the earth is the horizon a collection of things held together, or a class name, or a logical possibility of conception, or a system of “potentiality of consciousness”: it is a new type of being, a being by porosity, pregnancy, or generality, and he before whom the horizon opens is caught up, included within. His body and the distances participate in one same corporeity or visibility in general, which reigns between them and it, and even beyond the horizon, beneath his skin, unto the depths of being.⁴

For me, these words encompass the invisible, entangled, assemblage of the Self and the Other. Here Merleau-Ponty refers to Husserl's exterior and interior horizons—views of the Other (being) as visible in general, yet distant and porous. When beings encounter one another, they are caught up and involved in each other's horizons. This quote is helpful for me as it gives visual thinking to the ‘more-than...’, which I discuss throughout this exegesis. When I think of horizons, I think of a distant view that I perceive, yet I know that distance holds things I cannot see.

⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Intertwining–The Chiasm,” in *The Visible and the Invisible* (Northwestern University Press, 1975), 130–55.

Section 1. Method. Methodology.

Part 1. One-Thing-Leads-To-Another

In this section, I discuss the approach of one-thing-leads-to-another and how it drives the network of elements that I cooperate with as a co-agent, to arrive at materialising the invisible gap. In addition, the elements in question are described.

I find the indeterminate space that I am referring to as the gap lyrical and full of potential. I did not want to presume, through mental machination alone, what 'more-than...' looks like. For this reason, I came to suppose that to call forth a visual life for an invisible thing I should cooperate with the elements needed for materialising the concept. In other words, I needed a system for *making* my way towards objects and assemblages that might signify this gap. The system of one-thing-leads-to-another was deliberately adopted in the studio to assist in finding the visual and conceptual parameters of this enquiry. To exemplify this process, I will map the genealogy of a small suite of installation objects, and then frame how other artists have used a similar approach.

The Genealogy of *Paper Stack*, *Felt Bolster* and *Sunny*

I took a cooperative approach with the elements involved in giving visual life to the invisible gap. These elements are things such as (but are not limited to) materials, processes, methods, tools, equipment, labs available, my own skill set, conversations, events, readings, relationships, and life experiences. Each of these elements has agency in defining what, how and when objects are made.

Paper Stack

Paper Stack is a peculiar and always-in-progress object that started in July 2022. As an object that commenced as a thinking-through-making exercise, it has evolved to become a stratified archive of the project's trajectory. This object has revealed the most about how things can express and present in more-ways-than-one as seen in Fig.3. Originally made of pulped watercolour paper offcuts alone, it grew to include pulped acrylic paintings that I had previously produced and abandoned. I became interested in how subtle flecks of acrylic paint separated and floated to the surface of the paper. The flecks were like *signs of life* for me (see Fig.4). I experimented by adding to the pulp small amounts of other material that had been subsequently introduced to the studio work, replacing painted material. This included carded wool and shredded Hi-Viz fabric.



Figure 3. N. Donald. *Paper Stack* evolving (June 2022 – April 2023). Dimensions 650mm x 320mm. Height variable. The fluorescent flags on the last image of *Paper Stack* are post-it note-like. This was influenced by noticing how many post-it notes I used in my books for this research as the submission deadline grew closer. In the last image, this was the first time I had thought to place *Felt Bolster* under *Paper Stack*, forming a contained assemblage. Given their genealogy, it should not have surprised me that they would go so well together this way.

The oval shape and size were chosen to oppose the rectangular piece-of-paper-ness. Originally made to be hung, a reinforced hole was required. This is the logic that informed the eyelets, which were painted yellow to visually link to the yellow in other works. As the stack accumulated, its *bodily-ness* became apparent, at which point it migrated from the wall to the floor and became a stack, held at one end by threading a thin dowel, painted yellow, through the eyelets. *Paper Stack* continues to grow in height and features in every installation.



Figure 4. N. Donald. *Paper Stack* (June 2022), details. Flecks of acrylic paint and painted paper eyelet.

This object arrived, not by design, but because I became attuned to the affective qualities of the elements I cooperated with. As such, the elements are ‘agents.’ To illustrate this notion simply, listed below are some of the agents that brought *Paper Stack* into being, demonstrating that not all agents are visible:

- Being attuned, searching intuitively and deliberately for clues that call out as signs of material life, and of the invisible
- My attraction to materials like paper, paint, and bold colours
- Coveting scraps, offcuts, and failed paintings so as not to waste good quality materials.
- Curiosity about facilities at Auckland University of Technology (AUT)
- Selecting simple processes that align with thinking-through-making
- Choosing processes and materials whereby the making brings the form into existence rather than a form driving the making.

In turn, the assemblage that is *Paper Stack* became an agent, in and of itself, influencing the visual terrain of what is sensed but not seen. The frill-like outer edges and stacking bring attention to the edges and spaces between each layer, concealing and revealing details. Flecks of paint act as glimpses, and holes are eye-like. The holding stick is a support structure that points, connects, and demarcates (see Fig.5).



Figure 5. N. Donald. Left, *Paper Stack* as part of a joint installation with studio peer Sav Mattyasovszky (December 2022), WM5 Foyer, AUT University. Gaps are highlighted between layers of paper. The yellow dowel holds the paper together, demarcating space and connecting to other work through colour. Right, early iteration of *Paper Stack* on the wall.

Felt Bolster and Sunny

A similar set of elements were involved in making *Felt Bolster* and *Sunny*, with the addition that *Paper Stack* had become a major player in influencing their making. Fig.6 shows these three components in the studio. I produced the felt for these works using the Auckland University of Technology felt loom. I am attracted to wool and paper in the same way and intuitively sense signs of life in these materials. The place of the felt in the project was slow to arrive, but I kept making it in various sizes (see Fig.7), studying it from the *corner-of-my-eye*. This corner-of-my-eye proceeded as a useful research method as the enquiry progressed. I learned through this sideways consideration that the resolve of some materials and objects stays latent until other materials and objects arise to affect and activate them.



Figure 6. N. Donald. Studio shots of related objects. (2022) Left to right: *Felt Bolster*, 370 x 330 x 300mm; *Felt Bolster* in assemblage with *Sunny* and *Paper Stack*; details of *Sunny* (1200 x700mm). Materials: Cotton stuffing, woollen felt and Hi-Viz trim.



Figure 7. N. Donald. Stacks of felt made on the AUT University loom (2022). Felt making became interesting to me in the same way that paper making was. Like paper making, it was an intuitive choice and what to do with it remained elusive until other affective agents arose. Materials: undyed wool. Size variable.

Felt Bolster arose as I thought about the presence of bodies and its form was influenced by the oval of *Paper Stack*. Concurrently, an opportunity arose to make an outdoor billboard-scale work where materials were selected to have a visual impact, maintain the themes of my master's enquiry, and be suited to an outdoor environment (see Fig.8). This provoked an interest in second-hand Hi-Viz vests and raincoats as material. This material influenced *Felt Bolster* with its sash of Hi-Viz trim, cut from an old vest. The blending of felted wool and Hi-Viz led to the work titled *Sunny*.

By describing these three installation components: *Paper Stack*, *Felt Bolster*, and *Sunny*, and being attuned to how agents call out, the method of one-thing-leads-to-another brought forth the shapes for the project, enabling me to relinquish being the sole agent. One-thing-leads-to-another doesn't traverse in a straight line, for example:

Felt - Paper Stack - Billboard - Bolster - Sunny

Inversely, each one-thing-leads-to-another 'disclosure'⁵ is but one hub of a web that comes in and out of view depending on the intensity of forces and influences. The *one thing* that *leads to another* is all interchangeable—swapping roles within practice and in each assemblage. Below, I list how the parts of this idiom operate.

- ONE THING: a clue or cue that makes itself seen—colour, material, an encounter, a conversation, a reading, an object. It is something that makes itself known as having a metaphorical and/or formal capacity to shape a visual life for an unseen experience. I feel that it chooses itself, allowing me to relinquish the decision of where to start.
- LEADS TO: the progression of ideas, an answer to a question, and discovering through making.
- ANOTHER: an unexpected connection, the provocation of a new visual or conceptual idea, restored confidence.

⁵ Disclosure is used here to mean, for example, an outcome that arises as one of many and which can operate in a state of flux.



Figure 8. N. Donald. Studio shot of finished and in-progress work, illustrating kinships of materials, colour, and forms (2022). The tarpaulin wall hanging is an early experiment for a small billboard project. Arranging and rearranging objects in the studio is part of my research process. Seeing things assembled in various ways often reveals visual clues not before considered.

The realm that Australian artist Mikala Dwyer works within is also attuned to the forces that materialise the immaterial. She has an installation practice that involves the assembling of made and found objects and materials. Some are laboured over, such as her large-scale paintings, and some are provisional. Her interests reside in thinking about the invisible forces that shape our world-navigating logic. In grappling with immaterial ideas, Dwyer explores what shape to give them. In an interview about her 2017 exhibition, *A Shape of Thought*, Dwyer talks to the curator, Wayne Tunnicliffe, about conjuring symbols for her large paintings (see Fig.9), describing them as “...lending themselves to occult or sacred geometries.”⁶ She is cognisant that symbols are shapes culturally agreed upon over vast amounts of time, and that the job of the artist is not to come up with new symbols, but to understand their operations.

Through what I see as a making-arranging-into-knowing process, Dwyer makes in a way that deliberately considers all the forces, seen and unseen, (such as air, space, gravity, architecture, material, action, chance, empathy, or colour) to arrive at materialised ideas. Tunnicliffe articulates this process succinctly:

Mikala Dwyer’s richly inventive sculptural practice is marked by a receptiveness to the physical properties of materials and the matrix of meanings that gather around them.

⁶ Art Gallery of NSW, “Artist Mikala Dwyer Installs Her Exhibition *A Shape of Thought*,” September 11, 2017, video, 6:27, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9pz66iROXA>.

Dwyer has written of the importance to her of the ‘consciousness and liveliness of matter, and the animation of matter and objects,’ and an attentive response to the substance of our world has driven her practice for more than thirty years. Her work is expansive, engaging and even excessive as it embodies ideas in a panoply of forms and the spaces these forms occupy. Dwyer’s agency in making is paired with a cultural medium’s capacity to channel unexpected meanings from everyday objects, and her works almost always combine the found with the made. She is deeply attuned to how materials affect us both overtly and at a subconscious level and her art haunts our imagination and our psyche long after we encounter it.⁷

I understand that Dwyer deliberately cooperates with multiple forces, arriving at materialising the immaterial, not by design, but by moving, making, and arranging. The entanglement of these elements conjures and defines the work. At times, previously shown work achieves new life in subsequent arrangements, as they in themselves have an affective quality. Their new kinship grouping allows the work to express and present in more-ways-than-one. As Tunnicliffe puts it in his essay on Dwyer:

To think through matter and meaning has resulted in an art practice that is cumulative and iterative, and that includes its own history as a generative tool. Previous works are recycled into new works as they evolve into new spaces and new exhibitions, and entirely new works may be made while retaining titles and key forms from the past.⁸

In this way, Dwyer comes to her work in cycles and epicycles, like one-thing-leads-to-another.



Figure 9. Works by Mikala Dwyer in *The Shape of Thought* (2017). Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. Photograph reproduced from <http://www.mikaladwyer.com/a-shape-of-thought-2017/2017/11/3/2017/11/3/mikala-dwyer-a-shape-of-thought-2017-art-gallery-of-new-south-wales-sydney>. Images courtesy of the artist.

⁷ Wayne Tunnicliffe, “Mikala Dwyer: A Shape of Thought,” in *Mikala Dwyer: A Shape of Thought*, ed. Mikala Dwyer et al. (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2018) 11.

⁸ Tunnicliffe, “Mikala Dwyer,” 11.

Part 2. Nice To Meet You

Installation. Assemblage. Agencement.

As I started to understand the constellation of affective agents (materials, objects, the artist, viewer, and other forces, visible or not), committing to object-based installation made sense to me. In doing this, I could think of individual objects as community members that could be assembled in more-ways-than-one. This serves my interest in provoking, for the viewer, an encounter of ‘more-than...’ In this section, I discuss installation as an *agencement*⁹, a term coined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Silvia Gherardi and Michela Cozza describe *agencement* in a way that resonates with how my enquiry developed from drawing and painting to an installation practice:

A post-humanist practice theory... positions social practices as the unit of analysis (instead of structures or agencies), conceiving, for example, a research practice as an agencement of heterogeneous elements (human bodies, more-than-humans, discourses, knowledges) that achieve collective agency through entanglement, in their capacity to affect and be affected. The reason for preferring to keep Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) French term agencement, poorly translated into English as assemblage, is that the French term retains its root in agency and has a processual connotation—the idea of establishing or forming an assemblage—not a fixed state of assembled things. The difference aims to shift attention from what is interconnected towards how the entangled elements achieve agency by being interconnected. Moreover, the power of affect within an agencement is formed as the elements’ capacity to affect and be affected.¹⁰

There are several aspects captured in this quote that feel relevant to this project: *heterogeneous elements, collective agency, entanglement, processual and assemblage*. My installation practice was established by seeing how my paintings could express themselves in more-ways-than-one, by understanding them as installation objects and having them occupy various kinship groupings that evolve over time. Paintings could lie flat, behaving like a game board between ceramic objects, or be a shelf-object as opposed to an image-object, whereas with other objects they perform as a relational device and/or support structure (see Fig.10 and 11). Elements and objects are heterogeneous, which entangle in their assemblage, collectively purveying the forms for the enquiry in emergent and processual ways.

⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

¹⁰ Silvia Gherardi and Michela Cozza, “Atmospheric Attunement in the Becoming of a Happy Object: The Special Gut Feeling,” in *Doing Process Research in Organizations: Noticing Differently*, ed. Barbara Simpson and Line Revsbæk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 18.



Figure 10. N. Donald. Details from early installations, arranging paintings as installation object – shelves are paintings and paintings are shelves (August to September 2022). Top left to right: repurposed and made shelf-objects on *HERE* felt mat, found wooden bookend, acrylic paintings on board; Middle left to right: small acrylic paintings on board, repurposed, white, half-round shelves, made shelf-objects (brown, grey and yellow). Bottom: *Portrait Series* (Blue, Green, Red and Buff) Acrylic paintings in repurposed faux-gold frames. NB: *Portrait Series* are four paintings anthropomorphizing the *Paper Stack* shape and using the eyelet as literal eyes. This exploration was instigated by retrieving the old frames (with oval mats included) from storage and was one of my earlier experiments of including ideas of *peculiar* and *playful*.



Figure 11. N. Donald. Details of an installation collaboration with my studio peer Sav Mattyasovsky (December 2022). Examples of paintings as objects, assembled with other installation objects. All ceramic objects are Mattyasovsky's work. NB: This installation project was the second of three iterations with Sav. We used this process to challenge how we saw our objects operating. WM building, Level 5 foyer, AUT University.

Gherardi and Cozza describe “gut feeling”¹¹ as a special deep understanding which is from the body. As a mode of understanding, gut feeling is what instigates “noticing differently.”¹² Through this they discuss affect in posthuman practice theory, calling to attention the potency of “elusive knowledge” and “sensible knowing”¹³—things we feel and sense yet can’t see or quantify.

Noticing differently is key for me, as I am interested in how the art encounter might provoke a shift from looking to sensing. Through this project, I endeavour to explore ways to arrange objects in space to affect a reflective *gaze* where ‘more-than...’ can come into view. In my practice, interconnected elements such as; materials (and their histories); objects/images (and their connotations), and arrangements (and their disruptions or consolidations) establish an agencement. I’m exploring how this could articulate something hidden.

More-than-meets-the-eye using a one-thing-leads-to-another approach turns making into discovering and vice versa. For example, tracing marks on the studio floor, searching for signs of life, eventuates in a suite of images and objects that are both the materialisation of the enquiry and the force that progresses it. Giving a visual life to a sensed but not seen experience of ‘more-than...’ feels challenging. It is a processual and emergent endeavour that requires me to be open and attuned to many processes, materials and ideas that call from that gut feeling.

Signs of Life: Tracing, Drawing, Painting

In my earlier explorations, I thought about my threshold position to the signs of life in the studio at AUT. I started tracing marks on the studio floor left by past students’ practice, using a black marker and transparent paper (see Fig.12). These accumulated in stacks, so I could trace the tracing to find the shape and composition for new paintings. Every step held clues, revealing new visual ideas. I started to see how being attuned and cooperative with elements opened pathways.

¹¹ Gherardi and Cozza.16

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.



Figure 12. N. Donald. Tracing marks on the floor. Tracing the tracings, intuitively selecting lines and turning it into a painting (2022) Acrylic and vinyl paint on Fabriano paper. 1120mm x 760mm.

Painting and drawing were my focus when I commenced this research project. However, I aimed to let go of preconceived ideas of how things would visually manifest, and allow instinct, materials, and processes to assist in finding the parameters. The enquiry is invested in the *agencement*, rather than adhering to a particular art discipline. Painting alone seemed too contained, holding me in the mindset of trying to *pictorialise* the ‘more than...’, which contradicts my aims. I disrupted this mindset by looking at my paintings not as singular objects, trying to do the whole job of carrying an enquiry, but as installation objects. When in kinship with other objects, a painting shares the load of expressing that which is difficult to express. Making *Paper Stack* was pivotal in shifting my perspective. *Paper Stack* comprises a mix of pulped watercolour paper and discarded paintings on paper, held together by a wooden dowel, painted yellow (see Fig.13). These ingredients can equate to being a painting. This quickly moved me toward other work that treated painting not as a picture but as an object. I discovered the idea of things expressing and presenting in more ways than one, permitting the object to be ‘more-than...’ Paintings, therefore, became assemblage and installation objects.



Figure 13. N. Donald. Paper Stack in the making (2022). Materials left to right: shredded acrylic paintings and paper pulp; eyelets made from painted Fabriano paper.

Australian artist Rebecca Delange’s object-based installations explore “...the potential for art to intuit and express hidden topologies of experience.”¹⁴ In the exhibition context, she refers to a suit of active forces as an “equation”. This equation comprises poetic inferences, materials and their signifying properties, form, and spatial-object dialogue. In her doctoral thesis, she describes her process as “making-assembling”¹⁵ where provisional objects are arranged and rearranged regularly, each iteration creating hubs of kinship points and affecting spatial territories. Through the process of making, installing, and reflecting on her assemblages, she explores how art practice can evoke the invisible. The installation is an element that entangles space and the body into the work—affecting the experience of the work and the passageways through it. Delange describes her research this way: “The research explores the proposition that the unseen is both a cognitive and material condition that can be made manifest by investigating, shifting, and disrupting the intersecting signifiers of materiality through object/material-based spatial dialogue”.¹⁶

¹⁴ Rebecca Delange, “Unseen Equations: Sculptural Assemblage and Intersecting Topologies” (PhD thesis, RMIT, 2021), 1, <https://researchrepository.rmit.edu.au/esploro/outputs/doctoral/Unseen-Equations-sculptural-assemblage-and-intersecting/9922114357001341>.

¹⁵ Delange, “Unseen Equations,” 96.

¹⁶ Ibid. 1

The *equation* is like the concept of *agacement*. The elements at play in Delange's installations are objects and materials (such as ropes, sticks, photos, fruit, tabletops, fabric, plastic, and driftwood), assembled iteratively (see Fig.14 and 15). The operations and disruptions of signifiers, histories, sites and the 'there-ness' of the artist and viewer are also crucial. These elements are treated as equal agents within her "field of equations"¹⁷. Together they are entangled, forming an assemblage that is in a state of always becoming because the equation maintains a necessary indirectness—the maintenance of which gives the viewer an experience of some-thing-to-see-here. The invisible is registered through noticing differently, prompted by Delange's installation strategies. As the elements of the equation are adaptable, and in flux, a fixed reading is resisted and is the structure for always becoming, which unfolds through surprises – exceeding and disrupting what I might first imagine.

The role of arrangement in Delange's practice is similar to mine. For me, assembling and reassembling objects in a multiplicity of ways keeps one-thing-leads-to-another active. Details such as shape, colour, form, connecting structures, and edges within an object drop away or come to the fore, depending on the assemblage.



Figure 14. Rebecca Delange. Installation Details. Unseen Equations (Smoke and Mirrors). PhD Examination Exhibition (February 2022). Artery Project Space, Melbourne, Australia Images from <http://www.rebeccadelange.com/unseen-equations-smoke-and-mirrors.html>. Images courtesy of the artist.

¹⁷ Delange, "Unseen Equations," 6



Figure 15. Rebecca Delange. Installation details. Unseen Equations (Smoke and Mirrors). PhD Examination Exhibition (February 2022) Artery Project Space, Melbourne, Australia. Images from <http://www.rebeccadelange.com/unseen-equations-smoke-and-mirrors.html>. Images courtesy of the artist.

While the provisional is key for Delange, in my work the provisional is but one element. Some materials and objects, on their own accord, signify something-to-see-here. For example, the tarpaulin (as an object and a material) in my installations was introduced to perform in a multiplicity of ways: as a substrate for an outdoor piece, an addition of colour, a delineation of space, and a vertical plane to hang with or support other planes to create layers. The object-origin of the tarpaulin is still present, maintaining a reading as a thing that covers, protects, shelters, and shields. It is disrupted primarily by being involved in the art assemblage. Other objects are *laboured-over* because the labouring-over is a deliberate way to entangle the maker (me), as a co-agent in the affective equation (see Fig.16). In short, the move to an object-based installation practice has meant that the visual manifestation of ‘more-than...’ resides cooperatively with a multiplicity of agents.



Figure 16. N. Donald. Materials and objects, made and provisional, find their way into the project together (2022). Materials left to right: Woollen felt, paper, tarpaulin, wood, Hi-Viz parts.

Part 3. Hello. Is It Me You're Looking For?

Infinity is More-Than-Meets-the-Eye

In this section, I focus on the notion of more-than-meets-the-eye. When thinking about the question, 'How do I *know* you?' I am thinking about a presence I can't name or see yet sense is there. As when I think of the Other, something always escapes. To expand this idea, I will refer to a Nordic myth followed by a brief discussion of Emmanuel Lévinas' concept of *Infinity*.

A version of the Norse creation story, retold by Olivia E Coolidge, describes how Odin, the Master of Gods, encountered the Norns, the maiden keepers of the future:

The Norns sat by a many-colored fountain whose spray rose behind them like a rainbow in the air. The Veils before their faces were thick and mysterious as clouds stirring and twisting in the wind. It seemed as though these would blow aside and reveal the face of the future, yet behind each fold always lay another, for none could pierce the mystery of the Norns.¹⁸

The just-out-of-reach-ness of the Other (the Norn in the case of this myth) seems akin to more-than-meets-the-eye, as described by the layers of parting, yet not revealing veils. This 'more-than...' exists but cannot be readily seen. I have a less-than-view of the Other (another being) because my idea of the Other is always exceeded by that which exists within the interior horizon of the Other, a horizon to which I have no access. Lévinas describes this phenomenon as "Infinity."¹⁹ Lévinas proposes that we navigate our three core relationships with: 'I' (a consciousness of myself); the World; and the Stranger or Other (meaning other people).

Here, I focus on the relationship of 'I with Other'. For Lévinas, the Other (person) is transcendent, as it is insufficient to bring them into same-ness with the Self. Therefore, letting the Other overflow and be more-than-meets-the-eye is *Infinity*. Lévinas suggests that the only way to comprehend each other is through dialogue, where we understand each other through a neutral term of being in general. In other words, I can know another in general terms and accept that an internal horizon is inaccessible to me, yet know that it is there, for it is there for me also. There is a necessary wrestling with the gap between Self and Other in how and whether we can bridge it or find meaningful ways to reach across in ways that maintain our idiosyncratic individuality yet simultaneously commune in *being in general*.

The layers between the Norns' veils are like the gap between Self and Other. I am interested in exploring this invisible gap and how I might materialise ideas of it through objects, materials, and visual strategies. How can I bring thing-ness to it, yet maintain its necessary elusiveness? To explore this notion, I decided to experiment with tropes of the

¹⁸ Olivia E. Coolidge, "The Creation," in *Myths, Fables and Folktales*, ed. Albert R. Kitzhaber and Stoddard Malarkey (USA: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc, 1974), p72.

¹⁹ Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*.

indirect and contrast the recognisable with the ambiguous. In section 2, I introduce some of the strategies I have used to prompt the viewer to consider not just what is visible, but also what is not.

Section 2. More Than Meets the Eye

Part 1. Peculiar as a Strategy

Through an attuned and continuous practice of making, installing, arranging, and rearranging materials, surprising things can and do happen. I welcome these discoveries, as they are insightful. The concept of ‘peculiar’ came about not by design, but by reflecting on the objects and images arising from being open to making visual connections, using the approach of one-thing-leads-to-another, and thinking about ‘more-than...’

I return to the object *Paper Stack*, a peculiar and always-in-progress object. *Paper Stack* became an object that procures and delivers ideas for the practice. It does this iteratively, as I wonder what to do with it—how and where to display it, how to keep it together. As it grew, it started to have a sense of familiarity. Among other things, the object resembles a stack of invoices secured on a spike, a colour chart when fanned out, a toy sailboat (see Fig.18). Yet it is not these things. Its identity is not quite graspable, and its peculiarity operates in allowing the object to be a multiplicity of things; what is seen of its horizons depends on whom and what it is entangled with. As such, it is *Infinity*, it is ‘more-than...’

The strategy of bringing the recognisable into play and then setting it askew with the unexpected keeps the encounter with the objects and installations broad. *Felt Bolster* is another example of this. It projects its bolster-ness first and foremost. It’s like an odd little cartoon character, a stuffed toy. *Paper Stack* and *Felt Bolster* have a similar peculiarity about them because they are members of the same family tree of installation objects, as seen in Fig.17.

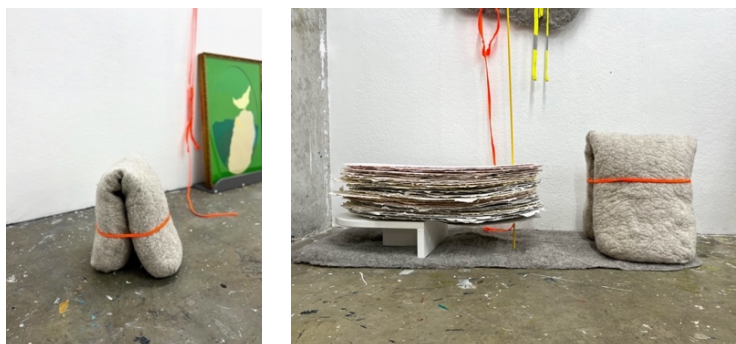


Figure 17. N. Donald. *Felt Bolster* and *Paper Stack* as ‘peculiar’ family members (2022).

Peculiar is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as; “Distinguished in nature, character, or attributes from others; unlike others, ... special, remarkable; distinctive”²⁰. I am deducing (for this practice) that a peculiar thing is a thing that is recognisable yet perhaps ambiguous, amorphous, or even poetic. Therefore, being indirect and a little strange can go a long way in saying the unsayable.



Figure 18. N. Donald. *Paper Stack* being 'peculiar.' Presenting and expressing in more-ways-than-one. 650(l)mm x 320mm(w), height variable (2022-23). Top row: looks like a colour chart or a stack of invoices on a spike. Bottom row: looking boat-like.

²⁰ Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd ed.s.v. "Peculiar," accessed May 4, 2023, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/139494>.

Peculiar is not generally used for the work of Aotearoa artists Elliot Collins and Andrea du Chatenier, but there are aspects of their sculptural objects that appear as such to me.

Elliot Collins is an interdisciplinary artist. His practice spans from text pieces and poetry to painting, photography, installation, and sculpture. *Non-uments* are four (peculiar) objects made by Collins in 2022 (see Fig.19). Collins describes these works as memorials/monuments recalling small things. They are pieces that imbue time and memory, calling on materials to evoke a sense of nostalgia and of time passing and places changing. He refers to found driftwood as being in liminal space, dead, not resting, yet not growing; and to the buttons as dependable things but things we often lose, and objects that stay the same as place changes around us.²¹ As a viewer, I find myself looking for recognisable shapes within these objects: animals, organs, and maps. The titles for these objects: *Friend*, *Toroā*, *Oxheart*, and *Tio*, were perhaps designated by the artist upon reflection of the finished object and leave traces of meaning. Furthermore, he describes the buttons as being eyes, like in *Tekoteko* or portraits. There is something poetic going on here, something felt that evades words. These peculiar shapes keep me in a slow-looking mode as I consider my semiotic relationship with these objects and what I know about Collin's art practice.



Figure 19. Elliot Collins *Non-uments* (2022). *Left to right; Friend, Toroā, Oxheart*. Found buttons on found wood. *Tio*. Glass beads on oyster shell. Images from <http://www.elliottcollins.com/writing/2022/2/1/button-non-uments>. Images courtesy of the artist.

²¹ Elliot Collins, "Button Non-unmints," *Elliot Collins* (blog), February 1, 2022, <http://www.elliottcollins.com/writing/2022/2/1/button-non-uments>.

“Gobby forms”, “imaginative doings of Dr Seuss” and “Sponge Bob Square Pants” are the “cartoon-like encounters” evoked for Richard Fahey by ceramicist Andrea du Chatenier.²² The first four images in Figure 20 are works from her 2020 exhibition, *Eigenleben*.²³ The last two are works from a 2023 exhibition at McLeavey Gallery, called *Joy*.²⁴ These pieces have the air of an idiosyncratic mantelpiece ornament. As with Collin’s work, I look for what I can recognise, but whatever I think I know is overturned by oozing colour and glossiness, unexpected protrusions, and additions, alongside beguiling titles that hint at and provoke ambiguous readings.

Looking at these objects and their titles, contemporary issues seem to dwell here. Perhaps a soup of chatter about capitalism, climate change, pandemics and inequity acted as an agent of influence on the works and their titles (such as *Biome*, *Glomerate* and *Drowned Pyramid*). Whether an intended reading or not, for me du Chatenier’s strategy of cartooning her forms keeps these objects open and ‘more-than...’.

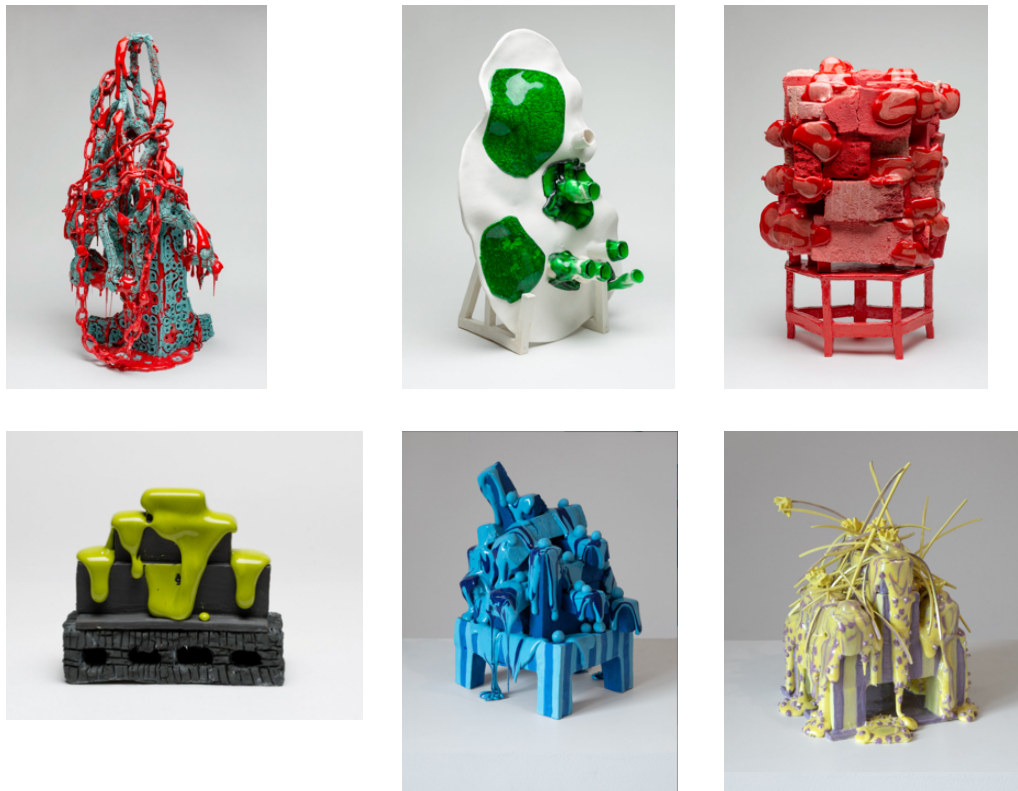


Figure 20. Works by Andrea du Chatenier, (2020-2022). Top row, left to right: *Red Tree*; *Biome*; *Glomerate*. Bottom row left, *Drowned Pyramid*. From the exhibition *Eigenleben*. The National, Christchurch, Aotearoa. Images from <https://thenational.co.nz/exhibitions/eigenleben/>. Bottom row centre and right; *Bighousebues*. *Pearlygirl* (2023) From the exhibition *JOY*. McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, Aotearoa. Images from mcleaveygallery.com/exhibitions/Joy/. (photo credit: Russel Klyen) Images courtesy of the artist.

²² Richard Fahey, “Ornery and Opulence: In the Thrall of Andrea Du Chatenier’s Ceramics,” *The Art Paper*, October 25, 2022, <https://www.the-art-paper.com/journal/andrea-du-chatenier>.

²³ “Andrea Du Chatenier,” The National, accessed March 26, 2023, <https://thenational.co.nz/artists/andrea-du-chatenier/>.

²⁴ “Joy,” McLeavey Gallery, accessed April 21, 2023, <https://mcleaveygallery.com/exhibitions/joy/>.

Fahey describes the encounter this practice evokes for both artist and viewer in lavish terms. He states, “Here is an aesthetic and material practice, whose virtue is to tug away at those cerebral recesses, those places where phantasmagoric dreaming and the imaginative doings of Dr Seuss still lurk.”²⁵

This passage describes a longing for time spent in liminal and inexact places and resonates with how I enjoy ‘being’ when making and arranging—occupying a neither-here-nor-there space. The making isn’t about what I see in the world but how I sense and feel during the process. Over-naming or categorising through visual representation means that my sensed understanding escapes and slips away. Keeping objects and images peculiar, inexact, and even playful gathers in the complexity and multiplicity of liminal places and experiences.



Figure 21. N. Donald. Installation objects being peculiar together in studio assemblages (2022-23). Top row: The two *Portraits* (red and green) are descendants of *Paper Stack*—the body form and eyes are a direct influence. The faux-gold frames were repurposed. *Paper Stack* is a descendant of the readymade, white, half-circle shelves seen at top and bottom left and bottom far right images. Along with *Felt Bolster*, all are from the same family tree, which gives them a similar peculiarity.

²⁵ Fahey, “Ornery and Opulence.”

Part 2. I Think About You All the Time

Something-To-See-Here! Materials and Signs of Life

The handmade has an important role in the enquiry as it keeps the practice somatically rooted, where I use senses like intuition to engage in what I call corner-of-my-eye-research. This is where I feel my way through ideas while attuned to the elements at play in the *agencement*. For the found and ready-made, this is made possible by the process of assemblage—an ‘arranging-making.’ Through the object-origin history of the ready-made, the handmade is activated in a multiplicity of ways.

Materials and objects in this project each contribute as signifiers. I draw on various clues from object-origin histories and involve materials and objects in the art assemblage to evoke a sense of presence. This presence is the subjective, internal experience. In this following section, I exemplify this relationship by focusing on my handmade material, woollen felt, and then tarpaulin and Hi-Viz vests, as the ready-made. But firstly, I survey the expanded textile practice of Teelah George. This will illustrate how the handmade introduces the element of *time spent*, which declares ‘*I am Here*’. Processes such as felt and paper making, painting, and stitching afford the ability to drift about my internal horizon, that space invisible to others. In this way, the objects become full of presence. Tethered to the encounter of the work is the presence of the maker. This is palpable in the embroidered work of Australian artist Teelah George.

George began her art career as a painter with an interest in amateur archives, cultivating a fascination with found materials associated with family albums and scrapbooks: the weathered cardboard, yellowing paper, peeling tape, old envelopes, and the histories ingrained in them. Materials are time markers, holding stories and memories, permeated with presence. Embroidery on linen went on to replace paint strokes to mark time; George now creates weighty, thickly stitched, banner-like work (see Fig.22). These works are not designed in advance but emerge slowly and intuitively, ultimately becoming an object of time invested.

I find these works mesmerising, where the presence of the maker is undeniable. I am acutely aware of her time spent in a process that entangles and involves her interior horizon—the space I don’t have access to is inferred and signalled in George’s work. Thus, the work becomes hyphen-like, in that my sensed understanding of the entangled agents active in her work operates as a tentative tether between the maker and the viewer.

George is steadfast in adhering to stitchwork, coloured thread, linen, and bronze. Visual possibilities are endless in this emergent and processual practice, always producing something other-worldly. Though my processes are not as laborious as George’s, this example clarifies the purpose of attending to and labouring over some of my own materials, objects, and assemblages.



Figure 22. Teelah George. Sky Piece, *Falling* (Melbourne, Perth) (2020-21). Neon Parc, Melbourne, Australia. Images from <https://neonparc.com.au/artists/teelah-george>. Photo Credit: Madé Spencer-Castle, courtesy of Neon Parc.

I am interested in the subtle visual resonance between my washed felted wool and George's work where undulations, snags, creases, and ribs appear. The earthiness of linen and thread and woollen felt share a similar *life-ness*. George's pieces are full of life put there by her, commingled with the life of cotton and flax. The mammalian is present in wool, semiotically laden with signs of life and life embedded there through cultural uses (blankets and warm clothing, for example). Machine felting is simple but still time-consuming for the size I'm wanting. On the loom, barbed needles mechanically entangle and compress carded slivers of wool fibre into felt, while rollers guide it through (see Fig.23). To form a firm, thick piece, I keep feeding it through the loom, adding more layers of wool slivers. For extra consolidation of the fibres, I put the felt through a warm wash cycle.

This final stage is how the scallop-like edges formed, influencing other ways of visually signifying the invisible, which will be discussed in section 2, part 3. This material, which has come with a life of its own, was chosen for its rawness, texture, colour, smell, and what it signifies to me.

One of the key factors in selecting materials is the recognition of signs of life. Insights into where to look for the right material for the project unfolds with the one-thing-leads-to-another approach. At the start of the project shelves, frames, small boxes, and transparent paper were what I already had on hand. Through an object-based installation practice, I began to see how found and made objects and materials work together. By way of process insights into new ways of working are revealed. This is how tarpaulins and ties entered the project as did second-hand Hi-Viz wearables and raincoats.



Figure 23. N. Donald. Working on the Felt loom (2022).

Hi-Viz and Wearables as Material

Hi-Viz indicates there is ‘something-to-see-here’—an assertion I want to point toward in this project. As attention-seeking material, Hi-Viz is charged with meaning. How it is read depends on how it is perceived upon encountering it in its object-origin setting. It can be read as an obstacle and an annoyance at roadworks or, with an authoritative figure, as maintaining law and order. It can be read as a sign of care: things or people indicating safer passage through crowds, roadworks, or landslides; someone indicating themselves to be of service, something being attended to and/or fixed for your enjoyment or safety.

In my practice, I use Hi-Viz vests and raincoats as found material. I cut away the parts that say something-to-see-here the most, like the reflective and fluorescent trim, or parts that have pockets, zips, toggles, or buttons, as these are useful for joining other materials (see Fig.25).The Hi-Viz vest is still recognisable in its disassembled shape, but as a deconstruction of itself, and in the presence of contrasting materials, it can take on new readings. Figure 24 shows a work in progress in the studio using the unexpected combinations of handmade woolen felt, a readymade tarpaulin and deconstructed pieces of Hi-Viz wearable. This assemblage interrupts the usual reading of each of its components, requiring slow-looking to decode what is being encountered: a moment of seeing things in-more-ways-than-one.



Figure 24. N. Donald. Found/readymade materials with ‘laboured-over’ material (2023). This is a work in progress. Tarpaulin, woollen felt, Hi-Viz vest and jacket parts, eyelets. Approx: 1800 x 600mm.



Figure 25. N. Donald. Billboard work in the studio using Hi-Viz and other readymade materials: ties, rope, and eyelets (2023)
The signifying properties of the object-origin are exploited and brought into the art object as an affecting agent. Materials: Tarpaulin, Hi-Viz vest and raincoat parts, tie-downs, rope, eyelets, and gaffer tape. 2400 x 2200mm.

Part 3. More Strategies for ‘More-than...’

Edges, Seams, Frills, Layers, Gaps, Eyes

In this section, I discuss how using one-thing-leads-to-another as a generative approach has led to visual discoveries in the work that spoke to me about aspects of ‘more-than...’.

Eyelets first appeared in *Paper Stack* as a function to reinforce fragile holes. As an investigation into how to visually represent presence (Self and Other) the same eyelets became eyes in the portrait series (see Fig.26). However, what became more interesting to me was how the eyelet opened the potential for objects to be adaptable, enabling them to hybridize with other installation objects. Having this opening indicates that the object can express in more-ways-than-one, with its role and function poised to evolve and become ‘more-than...’.

Through exploring Hi-Viz wearables and tarpaulins, other fasteners became of interest: D-rings, Velcro, snap buttons, pockets, and toggles—all opportunities for adaptability. I started to think of this hardware as a tool for amenability and a device for giving rise to the unexpected. Sticks, ties, hooks, and shelf-like objects became implicated too, as they accentuate entry points—the spaces where objects and materials come together (see Fig.27). These details have dual roles as meaning makers and support structures, resulting in the flattening of material and object hierarchy.

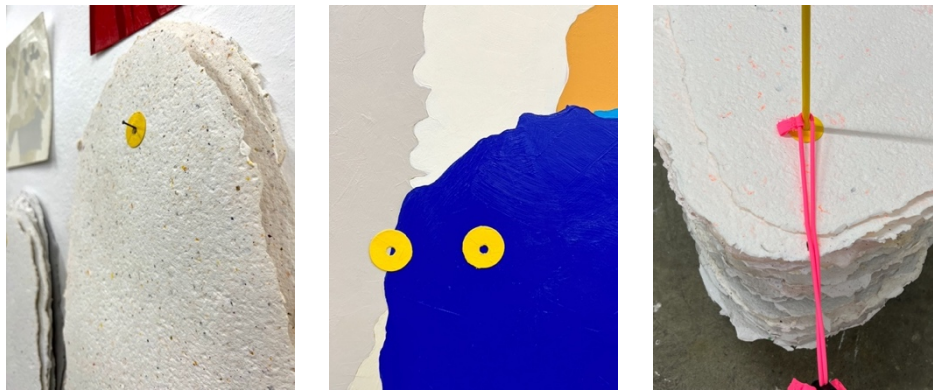


Figure 26. N. Donald. Details on *Paper Stack* and *Portrait: Buff* showing eyes, frills, edges, sticks, and ties.



Figure 27. N. Donald. These details show how I am using 'eyes', frills, edges, sticks, ties, hooks, zips, and toggles as visual strategies (2023).

This twofold operation of a material or object, being both structural and meaningful, can be seen in Mikala Dwyer's installations. *Square Cloud Compound* (see Fig.28) resembles an assemblage of tents or children's make-shift huts. Pantyhose, used to suspend the installation from the gallery ceiling and walls, functions as a structural device and signals an absent body.

Teelah George subverts the hierarchy of materials in her work by having bronze be of service to her stitched works. Bronze historically takes precedence over stitching and textiles. This relationship has been levelled in George's work as bronze is used as the support structure for her hangings. Together, the bronze frame and hanging contribute to the reading. In Figure 29, *Clock (a second, a second, a third)* the bronze frame is window-like, bestowing a sense of presence.

Reflecting on the object-ness of my handmade felt and paper, I became interested in the edges, and gaps formed by stacking them. Simultaneous with this visual discovery, I had been stacking and restacking my work in the studio for storage purposes. In the first place, this was in service of spatial efficiency (see Fig.30). Consequently, it became an opportunity to be attentive and playful with stacking arrangements in case something interesting happened (corner-of-my-eye-research). Glimpsing an edge of one work concealed by another set off thinking about concepts of revealing and concealing in the context of knowing the Other. In this way, all parts of an assemblage become meaningful: the work, the works edges, and the spaces between and around the work.

When exploring Hi-Viz vests as a material, disassembling them meant I could concentrate on the details, such as seams, trim, pockets, ties, and reflective parts. The trim then became ties, the pockets used for joining, and so on. The potential of the material is greater in its parts. British artist Pip Culbert used the edge as a strategy for pointing to the 'more than...' by cutting the main body from everyday items such as clothing, tents, quilts, and ironing board covers, leaving only the seams (see Fig.33). She hung these drawing-like objects on the wall where they transcended their object-origin, rousing attention to who is absent and what potential the lines and edges contain.

During the process of disassembling the vests to use the trim while thinking about something-to-see-here, the act of noticing peripheral details came to the fore. I saw how the edges of the felt and the paper were frill-like (see Fig.31). I had also been watching my studio peer Sav Mattyasovszky 'frilling' some of her ceramic objects. Like Hi-Viz, the frill has attention-seeking motives. The frilled edge encapsulates small spaces in interesting ways and makes the viewer consider not only the frilled material, but the spaces and shadows created by it. Details of Emma Fitt's work from the exhibition *Losses and Crosses* at the Pah Homestead in 2022²⁶ demonstrate this clearly (see Fig.32).

Emma Fitts is an artist from Aotearoa who has an expanded textile and painting practice. Her work is banner-like, layering found fabrics, outstretched clothing, felt, and painted

²⁶ "Crosses and Losses," The Wallace Arts Trust, accessed November 30, 2022, <https://www.wallaceartstrust.org.nz/exhibitions/crosses-and-losses>.

canvas, creating hangings that contemplate the lives of other creative women of times gone by. A confluence of visual tactics such as edges, layers, pleats, drapery, and the intersection of space contrive to echo an ambience of her subject rather than pictorialize them.

Envisioning the idea of ‘more-than...,’ the sensed but just out-of-reach gap, I’ve been exploring these various visual strategies to indicate this mode of operating around peripheries. There is no parting of the veils for more-than-meets-the-eye. For whenever I think I know the Other, something escapes—as is true in the reverse. The Self and the other must cohabit and commune with this knowledge: that you (and I) are ‘this’ AND more.



Figure 28. Mikala Dwyer. *Square Cloud Compound* (2015-2016). Gallery of NSW, Sydney, Australia. <http://www.mikaladwyer.com/a-shape-of-thought-2017/2017/11/3/2017/11/3/mikala-dwyer-a-shape-of-thought-2017-art-gallery-of-new-south-wales-sydney>. Images courtesy of the artist.



Figure 29. Teelah George. *Clock (a second, a second, a third)* (2019-22). The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Melbourne, Australia. Image from <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/melbourne-now/artists/teelah-george/>. Photo Credit: Madé Spencer-Castle, courtesy of Neon Parc.



Figure 30. N. Donald. Work stacked in the studio at the AUT University, (2023). Noticing gaps, edges, concealing and revealing.



Figure 31. N. Donald. Pleat and frill-like details (2023), studio observations of materials and objects. Materials: Left to right: paper and wooden dowel; woollen felt; tarpaulin, woollen felt, Hi-Viz vest and raincoat parts, zinc and plastic eyelets.

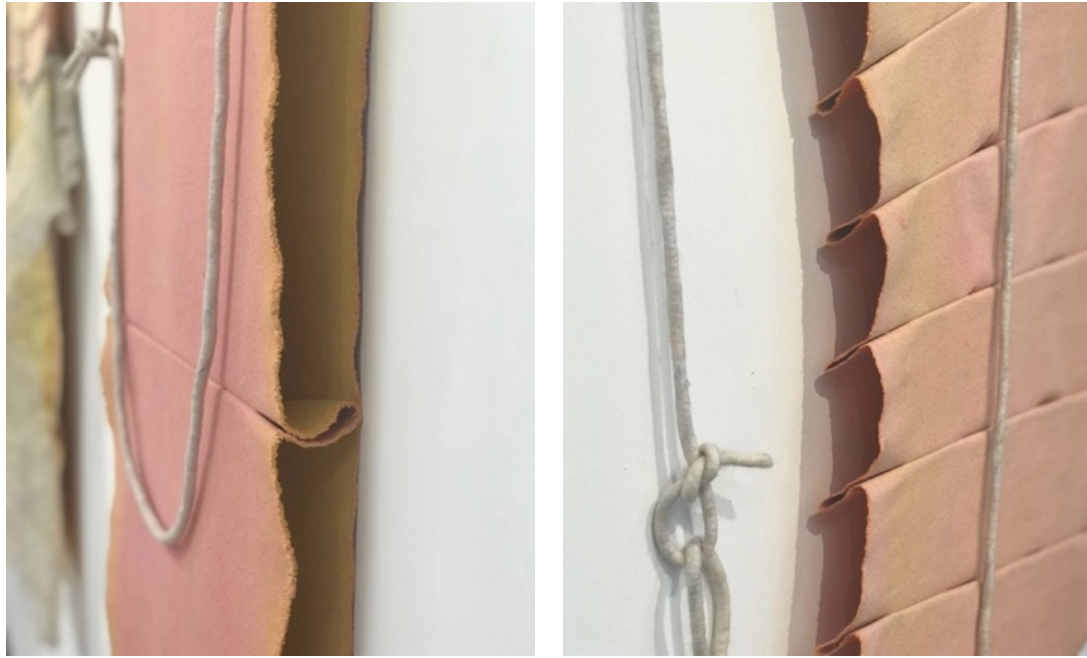


Figure 32. Emma Fitts, details from *Crosses and Losses* (2022). Pah Homestead, Auckland, Aotearoa. Images from <https://melanierogergallery.com/news/2022/emma-fitts-crosses-and-losses-pah-homestead>. Images courtesy of the artist.

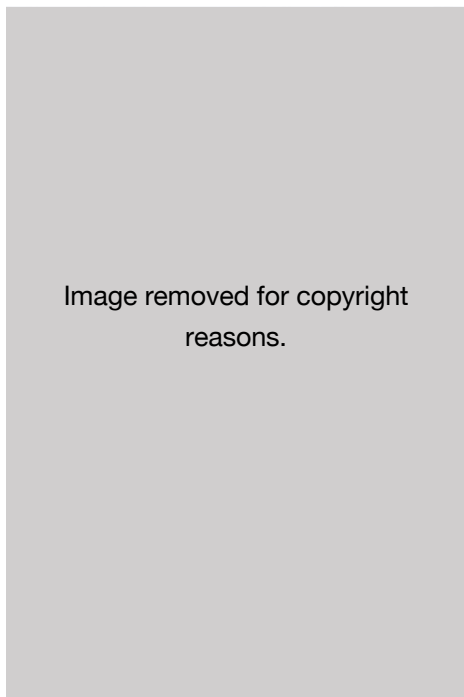


Figure 33. Pip Culbert. Left: *Green Shirt*. Right: *Quilt 1* (2014). Images from <https://fouladiprojects.com/portfolio-item/1497-2/>

Section 3. All The Ways I Tried to Reach You

Part 1. Reaching Across

The Hyphen-Object

Orbiting around the invisible gap between the Self and the Other is a sense of presence. Signs of life, in this project, are indicated by using felted wool, discarded Hi-Viz wearables and raincoats, and through forms like *Felt Bolster*. In the following section, I will discuss how the ‘hyphen-object’ evolved.

Felt Bolster in its peculiarity, has a playful and approachable character. It has features that make it amenable, such as its Hi-Viz tie that can be removed, to let it be a pillow or bolster, or remain, acting as an instrument for accessorising. It ignited an interest in making objects that read as having a *bodily* presence—one that reached out to the Other (another, internal, subjective experiencer). This started me thinking about the shape of hyphens, as I think one of the project's aims is to make an ‘offering’ to the Other. This offering procures the encounter of communing in being in general.

Colour, Hi-Viz, fluorescent and reflective fabrics, unexpected material pairings, peculiar shapes, the familiar and the unfamiliar; these visual signals are used to provoke an encounter that I think of as an invitation. The invitation is to a dwelling space for the Self and the Other that sanctions indirect knowing, where a sensible knowing through slow-looking (feeling and sensing) can take purchase in a moment of time. It is a playful space where an abundance of overflowing is possible. For this reason, I started thinking about my art objects and assemblages as ‘hyphen’ disclosures—as joining devices. In the context of installation, hyphens can be any shape that reaches out or across to the Other, in ways that simultaneously confess the junctions, the separateness, and the invisible gap between.

With one-thing-leads-to-another in place as a generative approach to making, looking to materials I had already used helped to materialise the forms which I call hyphen-objects. While studying the features of the Hi-Viz vest, I noticed that some were designed as a wrap-around garment that could be spread out. This design is amenable to different body shapes and sizes. I was surprised to find that, once outstretched, these vests resembled a peculiar, cartoon-like body shape. I exploited this exact shape to make the hyphen-objects seen in fig. 34.

These objects allow me to engage with visual ideas of playfulness and approachability. I could perform with these objects and add them to assemblages. The fluorescent edges of the grey felt hyphen-object (yet to be named) are the trim cut from the Hi-Viz vest that I had studied for this work. Edges and the object-origin still dwell in these works. The tufts act as time-spent, imbuing my presence. They're a functional device to keep the layers together yet lend themselves to a more lyrical meaning, as part of this peculiar object. These objects can be folded and bound to themselves, relating them to *Felt Bolster*. They can also be worn—making them amenable to those who encounter these hyphen-objects. They present and express in more-ways-than-one.



Figure 34. N. Donald. Work in progress (2023), Hi-Viz vest defines the form of the hyphen-object as determined by the approach of one-thing-leads-to-another. Materials: Repurposed white, cotton tablecloth, woollen felt, cotton stuffing, Hi-Viz trim and embroidery thread. Approx: 1200 x 1100mm.

In December 2022, I participated in Chris Braddock's and Layne Waerea's interactive performance piece *Leisure Conversations in Papakura*. Within the activities and the interactive objects, I found discernible aspects of play and the idea of hyphen-objects. *Leisure Conversations* was held at the Papakura Art Gallery and Massey Park in Papakura, Auckland. Upon arrival, participants were given a custom-made *Free Sweat Cushion-Bag*, a hybrid soft object—part lounge squab, part bag, part raincoat. From the gallery, the artists led participants to Massey Park for a directed, light, but sweat-inducing exercise involving the *Free Sweat Cushion-Bag* (see Fig.35). At the conclusion of the exercises, social dialogue around the topic of 'competition' was prompted, followed by a walk back to the gallery. Once there, participants were invited to engage in three different exercises involving three other performance props displayed in the gallery. These props were similar in nature to the *Free Sweat Cushion-Bag*. *Loveseat Cushion* was designed for three participants, *Back-to-Back Cushion* for two participants, and *Seven-fold Cushion* for seven participants. When outstretched, these cushion-objects became literal, three-dimensional hyphens as participants conducted conversational exercises on them.

Chris Braddock and Layne Waerea (Te Arawa, Ngāti Kahungunu, Pākeha) are both teachers and artists from Aotearoa. Waerea is a performance artist who seeks to interface with social issues particular to Aotearoa through public performance and humour; and Braddock is an interdisciplinary artist who explores structures of dialogue and the possibilities of non-hierarchical, social learning. In *Leisure Conversations in Papakura*, they shared an interest in pedagogy and the role of cooperative dialogue where participants, as entangled agents, shape the learning and therefore transformation of participants.

In the development of hyphen-objects in my project, three main aspects of *Leisure Conversations* stood out to me. Firstly, as participants (and agents) in *Leisure Conversations*, we encountered the adaptable cushion objects and were entangled with them as hyphen-objects through participation, creating a matrix of connections. Secondly, the title *Free Sweat Cushion-Bag* is a clue, to me, that presence is an element of concern in this project. The title suggests that the object captures and holds the sweat of the participant. Lastly, a yearning to connect more deeply strikes me here, especially in the context of Braddock's past (and ongoing) project *Invitation to Dialogue*.²⁷ This is particularly evident from the quote by physicist David Bohm that Braddock included in the *Leisure Conversations* exhibition sheet:

For quantum physicist David Bohm, cooperative dialogue searches for a spirit that flows where opinions and judgements are suspended. Bohm argues that our thoughts are not our own but instead emerge from a field of entangled experiences as 'participatory thought' where the individual ego is eliminated. As Bohm writes, "Love will go away if we can't communicate and share meaning... If we can really communicate, then we will have fellowship, participation, friendship, and love, growing and growing. That would be the way... Possibly it could make a new change in the

²⁷ "Invitation to Dialogue," Christopher Braddock, accessed December 10, 2022, <http://www.christopherbraddock.com/artworks/invitation-to-dialogue/>.

individual and a change in the relation to the cosmic. Such an energy has been called 'communication.' It is a kind of participation.^{28,29}

Bohm and *Leisure Conversations* reconsider hierarchical structures of conversation. The way in which the participants are invited to perform with the cushion-objects indicates to me that the essence of us is being accommodated. Above, Bohm discusses spirit, entangled experiences, communication, participation, and a relationship with the cosmic—nothing here stipulates that this communication is of a verbal nature only. I explicate from this that these communication encounters include being attuned to the matrix of clues exchanged invisibly during the process of sensing and discovering one another. This is of relevance to my project, as I've started to think about the art encounter as invitational, where objects, their assemblages, and the entangled prompt a registering of the invisible and therefore the 'more-than...'.³⁰

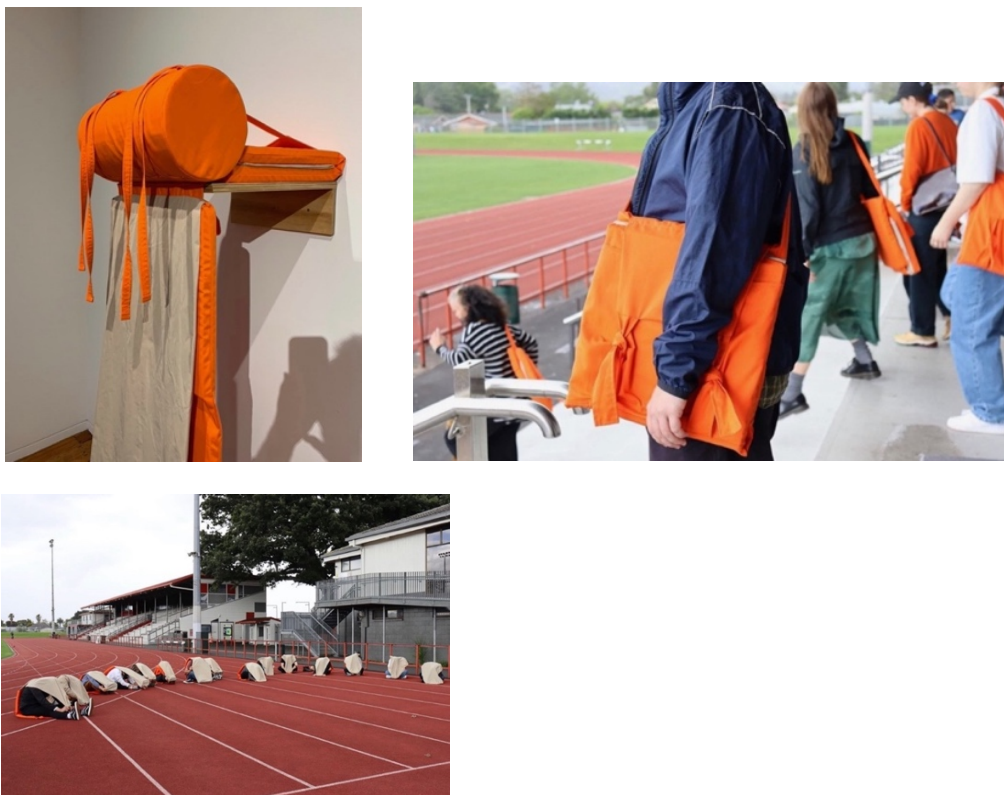


Figure 35. Chris Braddock and Layne Waerea's *Leisure Conversations in Papakura*. Papakura, Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland, Aotearoa (2022). Curated by Richard Orjis. Left to right: Chris Braddock, *Back-to-Back Cushion*, 2022; Performance with *Free Sweat Cushion-Bag* folded and carried; Performance, *Free Sweat Cushion-Bag* used in light exercise. (All cushions are cotton and nylon, fabricated by Arlo Pavlovich)
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=509475384536964&set=pb.100064235193652.-2207520000.&type=3&locale=it_IT. Photo credit Zahrah Khan. Images courtesy of the artists.

²⁸ David Bohm, *On Dialogue* (London: Routledge, 2014).

²⁹ Chris Braddock and Layne Waerea, performance artists, *Leisure Conversations in Papakura*, participatory performance, video, photography, and cushion-objects, Papakura Art Gallery and Massey Park, Auckland, New Zealand, December 10, 2022.

Part 2. Becoming Amenable

The Aesthetics of Play and Colour

Installations become playful through bold colour, assemblage, personable if not peculiar objects, adaptable features, bolster shapes, and hybrid vest-cushions. In this final section, I will explain why play has been an interesting way to think about art as a hyphen-object.

I have noticed the importance of play (in the form of assembling and reassembling) in its capacity for discovery and insight. In this way, play is functional. I propose also that the work's visual play(fulness) is as much of an affecting/affected agent as other elements, previously discussed. In addition, adaptable features of work, bolster-like objects, and hybrid vest-cushions implicate interaction—by me, or by the viewer—which suggest that the work could be 'played' with. In the context of the art object being a hyphen-object, I have become interested in how this sense of play makes hovering in the gap between the Self and the Other a more amenable endeavour.

In Mikala Dwyer's installation, *Square Cloud Compound* (see Fig.28) I think of pup tents and make-shift huts. In other installations, comprising a myriad of seemingly disparate objects, Dwyer organizes things into a circle, like a group of friends engaged in a game (see Fig.36). In viewing this gathering, I want to find a logic for how they came together: shapes, material, colour, object origin, or something invisible, like an intuitive coupling of things that can only be sensed. In these works, the viewer is implicated, involved, and entangled. To view these pieces in their entirety is to move through and around them.



Figure 36. Mikala Dwyer, *The Addition and Subtractions* (2017). Art Gallery NSW, Sydney Australia. Image from <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/2.2018.a-y/>. Images courtesy of the artist.

Further contributing to the theme of play are the costume-like objects that appear several times in Dwyer's work (see Fig.37). As a costume-hoody-towel, they are hybrid objects; I think of children's dress-ups, but they are also ominous looking, which adds ambiguity to how I read them. In these kinds of objects play and the peculiar are operating.



Figure 37. Mikala Dwyer. *The Guards* (2017). Sydney, Australia. Image from <https://www.1301sw.com/artist/mikala-dwyer/>. Images courtesy of the artist.

I also see the potential for play in Rebecca Delange's work. Materials, objects, and their relationship to architecture affects and defines spatial territories, evoking an encounter of being in a liminal space. The provisional maintains the possibility of rearrangements, re-categorizing, and reconnecting.

Emma Fitt's piece at Object Space, *Lapping at Your Door* (see Fig.38), consists of coloured canvases stretched around a metal framed structure. It also has a hybrid nature: part painting/sculpture/tent/hut/conservatory. It has a cubby house-ness, like Dwyer's *Square Cloud Compound*. Entering is like moving through to an alternate reality where there's an unspoken invitation to allow the brain to engage differently. As a child, I remember this feeling when making huts with bedding or playing inside big cardboard boxes.

What these examples share in their encounter is the materialising of a place "*where phantasmagoric dreaming and the imaginative doings of Dr Seuss still lurk,*"³⁰ as Fahey describes in Andrea du Chatenier's ceramic practice.

³⁰ Fahey, "Ornery and Opulence."

I wonder if these spaces, where you cross the threshold from the real world to the imaginary world, is where we experience *being in general*—where we softly acknowledge each other's human-ness, using the hyphen space (the invisible gap) to be at ease with our same-ness and our difference. That is what I mean by becoming amenable.

At the time of writing, my installation practice has not encapsulated space as much as Dwyer's *Square Cloud Compound*, or Fitt's *Lapping at Your Door*. Space is implied more subtly in my work by the layering of materials and the overlapping of objects. This may change when the work is set up in the gallery. In the context of play, I draw similarities between my current practice and that of Dwyer, Fitts, and Delange via colour, adaptability and arrangement. Moreover, du Chatenier's cartoon-like is my peculiar. The aim is to provoke the experience that a different world has been entered, requiring a different kind of looking. With the use of colour and play(fulness), the encounter softly entangles the viewer, with the intention of coaxing the viewer into playful curiosity.



Figure 38. Emma Fitts. *Lapping At Your Door*. Object Space, Auckland, Aotearoa (April 2022-Feb 2023). Images from <https://www.objectspace.org.nz/exhibitions/lapping-at-your-door/>. Images courtesy of the artist.

CONCLUSION

In my introduction, I shared a childhood experience to provide a personal context for this enquiry. To further illustrate my perspective, I will begin my conclusion with another account, as these instances have influenced the trajectory of my study.

My primary school years were spent in Mangere in the 1970s, where my school reports were peppered with comments such as wastes-time-fussing-about-nothing and could-do-better-if-wasn't-so-easily-distracted. However, I wasn't wasting time, I was occupied 'noticing' and making all manner of connections between the things and people in my vicinity.

I was noticing how a vapour trail looked like the chalk line on the blackboard, how the teacher's orange skivvy was the same orange as my classmate's jacket, whose stripy tee-shirt looked the same as her friend's stripy socks, that had the same colour combinations of the cuisenaire rods I used in maths and how that all reminded me of Sesame Street.

I noticed the smell of pencil shavings, methylated spirits from the copying machine, wax crayons, and leather dye from our craft projects.

I noticed my noticing, which led me to wonder what my friends, classmates, and family members were noticing. In that wonder, I discovered that there were worlds around me that I had limited access to, and that became a lifelong curiosity.

My art practice has long brought some externality to my inner world. Giving a visual life to that world is not about showing what it looks like but signaling that it is 'there.' The art encounter is where the 'there-ness' of multiple inner-worlds (artist and viewer) is palpable—tugging at underused senses to bring a presence to this gap between Self-Other.

I've used the term 'more-than...', to gesture that beyond the horizon of the seeable is 'more.' This 'more' is undeniable yet ungraspable, which creates what I called a 'gap' between the Self and Other. Throughout this practice-led enquiry, I have used object-based installations to intimate this gap. This led me to think about the idea of bridging that gap with a hyphen—not to bring one to the Other but as a place to gaze at the vista of the Other in all that is visible on that horizon and all that is not.

I commenced this project as a painter with the intention of being open to other practices. This intention came from the understanding that materialising the immaterial couldn't be 'designed,' and that I would need to work within a network of forces and influences (agents) to conjure images and objects. As a generative approach, one-thing-leads-to-another was adopted and kept active by my being attentive to the properties of materials, the outcomes of processes, and details revealed through assembling and reassembling objects.

Installation, for me, is 'world-building,' where it is not necessary to interpret what's going on but to simply 'feel' that something IS going on. Something-to-see-here is how I refer to this idea in writing, and the term is used to indicate an unnamable but knowable thing. Visually, this is attended to by exploiting attention-seeking operations in materials, shapes, and arrangements. Adaptable assemblages keep meaning in flux, provoking a sense of 'more-than...'.

To summarise, I can distil my enquiry findings into two main parts. The first is discovering how generative and productive the approach of one-thing-leads-to-another is, and how it could be depended on to make work when it was charged by the matrix of agents discussed in this exegesis. This way of working produced many insightful surprises, and the body of work that has resulted is like nothing I have made before. This has opened for me new ways of thinking about making. The second part rests on how I've noticed from what place I operate as an artist. The drive in this world-building, object-installation practice comes from the desire to create space where we can commune in our *being in general*. This space is the art encounter, where the unknown is filled with potential rather than with threat, shape-shifting is a disclosure of the sensed but not seen, and the peculiar provokes the registration of peripheries where things are *this* and 'more-than...'.

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APPENDIX

Visual Documentation of Final Exhibition

St. Paul Street Gallery (renamed: Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery, 23rd August 2023) AUT, Auckland. June 2023

My final installation included six assemblages: five in the main gallery and one in the window space on St. Paul Street. The two wall-hung assemblages were resolved prior to the exhibition, but have componentry that can be removed or added to, allowing for different iterations. The rest of the assemblages arose through play - a process of arranging and rearranging. Objects and materials were treated as installation components that could be continuously interchanged and responsive to space and context. This way I could continue to explore the potential of one-thing-leads-to-another and the idea of co-agents. In this group exhibition context, I considered the large, austere space and the quiet nature of the other artists' work. For example, I was interested in examining how the Hi-Viz components could play their role as 'something-to-see-here' yet participate with modesty to invoke a sense of cooperation and amenability with the intimate nature of my MVA peers work, Marijke de Jong's video installations on one side, and Heyes Johnson's subtle drawing-based photographs on the other. The window space offered an interesting spatial challenge due to its large height and narrow depth. I navigated this space like a large picture frame, activating a spatial/object dialogue through long, narrow strips of gathered materials that acknowledged the dimensions of the space, making this assemblage iteration site-specific.



Installation View. Assemblages 1-5.



Above: installation views. Bottom: Assemblage #5, Woollen Felt body (felt bolster), Hi-Viz trim, neoprene gather, reflective pocket, stuffed red hood with yellow painted wooden stand.



Top row: Assemblage #1 and #5. Middle row: Assemblage #4, Tufted vest body, neoprene gather, Hi-Viz trim, with yellow painted wooden stand. Bottom row: Assemblage #3, *Paper Stack*: pulped acrylic paintings and drawings, Hi-Viz remnants, yellow painted eyelet and stick.



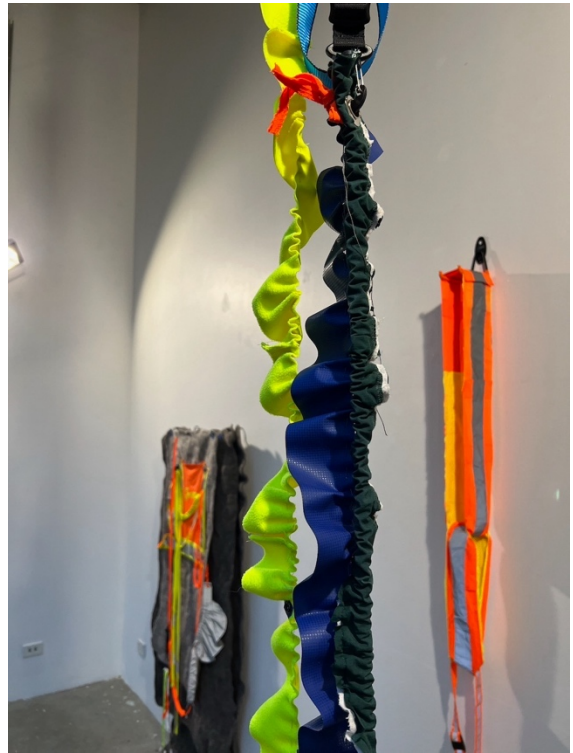
Assemblage #1, Gathers, rope, fasteners, felted wool on white shelf.
(Photo credit, middle and bottom images: Marijke de Jong)



Assemblage #2, Woollen fringe, reflective trim, woollen felt body, fasteners, eyelets, straps on white shelf.
(Photo credit top Images: Marijke de Jong)



Assemblage #6, *Sunny*: Hi-Viz parts, felted wool substrate, straps, jacket edges, tarpaulin gathers, eyelets, hooks, ropes.



Assemblage #6, *Sunny*. Installation details.