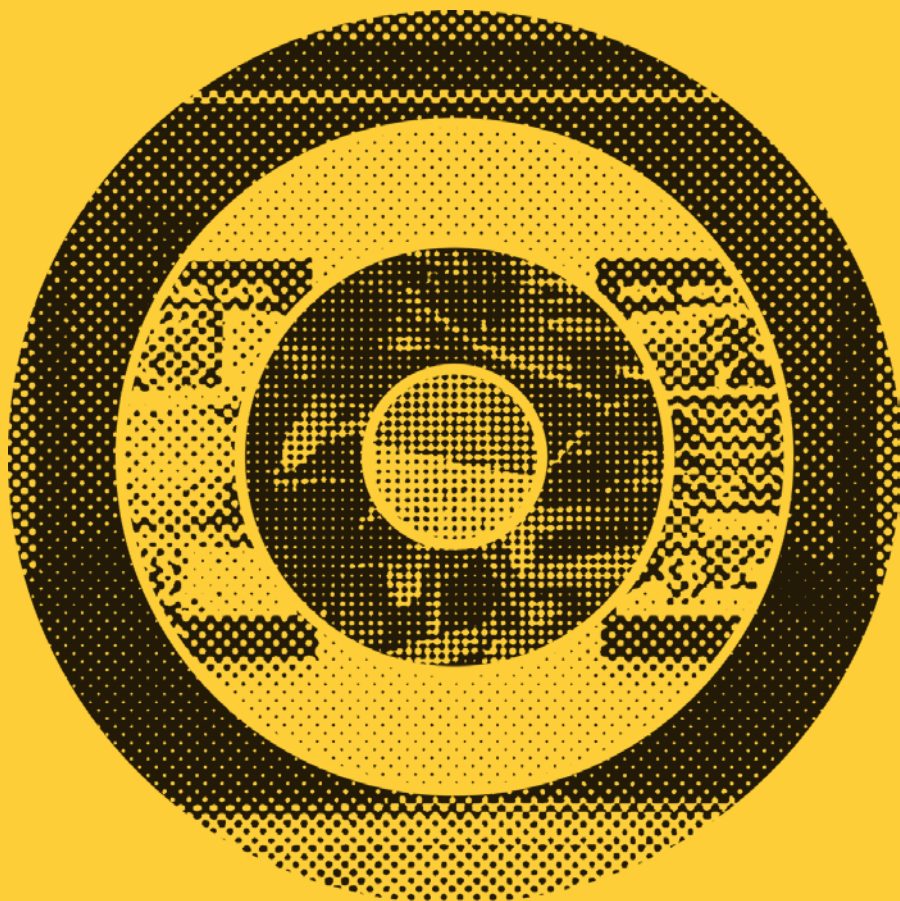
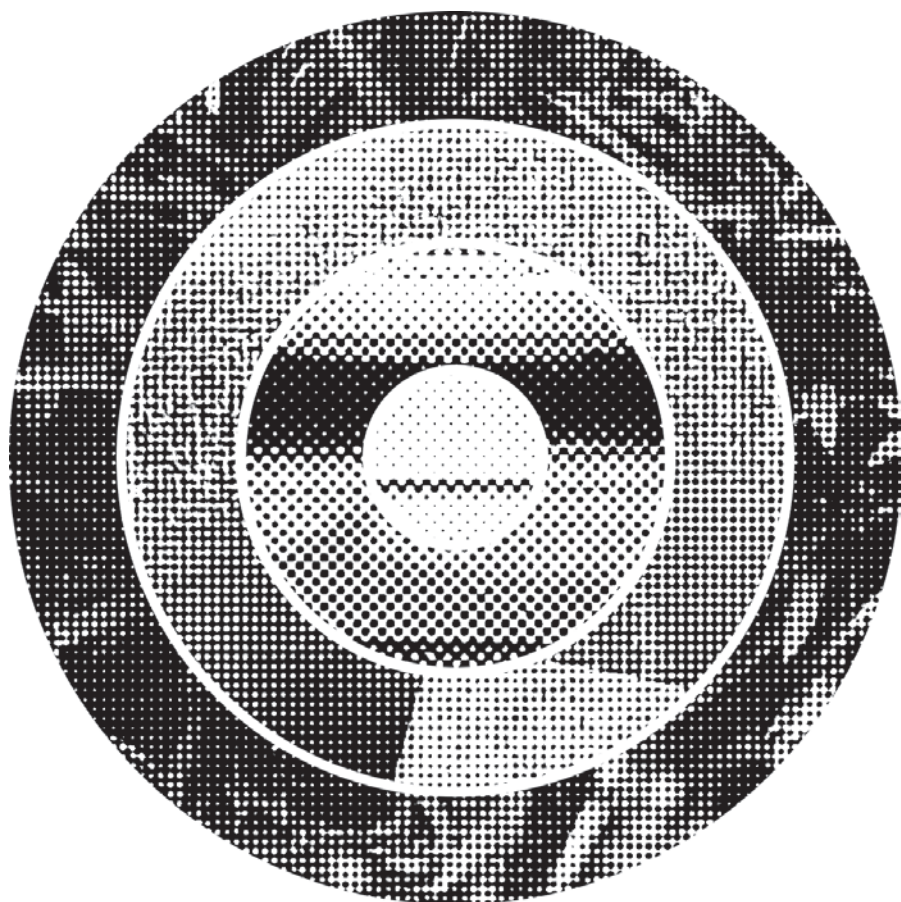


The Walters Prize 2014



The Walters Prize 2014



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Director's Introduction

Rhana Devenport

During recent discussions at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki about the *Walters Prize 2014*, Zara Stanhope, Head of Programmes, coined a new descriptor: 'New Zealand's toughest art prize.' This is apt for an art prize that is rigorous at every turn; an event undaunted by the near-impossible provocation of restaging contemporary art projects; complex in its selection process involving four independent jurors working incognito for almost two years to experience, research and decide on possible nominees; and tough for the sole judge who encounters the work for the first time and is required to make a decision without direct experience of the local cultural and socio-political environment. It's tough on those artists nominated, too, as they work to reframe a past project in the museum context. The Walters Prize is also tough on everyone when the winner is announced. Tough, however, can be good.

The Prize is now a fascinating series of exhibitions and discussions spanning a dozen years that teases apart the whole question of art prizes and their place in the cultural landscape. Taking its place amongst collection building, museum programming, biennales, art fairs, dealer galleries and artist-run spaces, the Walters Prize occupies a zone that intersects with the vivid commentary of online discourse and contemporary knowledge sharing. Each Walters Prize exhibition has offered a timely insight into current art practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The Walters Prize is named after the remarkable New Zealand artist Gordon Walters (1919–1995). It is awarded for an outstanding work of contemporary New Zealand art produced and exhibited during a two-year period, anywhere in the world. From inception, the intention of the Walters Prize was to promote contemporary art as a more widely recognised and debated feature of our cultural life. Previous Walters Prizes have been awarded to works by artists Kate Newby (2012), Dan Arps (2010), Peter Robinson (2008), Francis Upritchard (2006), et al. (2004) and Yvonne Todd

(2002). The respective titles of the works read like a William S Burroughs-inspired cut-up poem – *Crawl out your window, Explaining Things, ACK, Doomed, Doomed, All Doomed, restricted access, Asthma and Eczema* – and hint at each artist's concerns. There is no question that the Prize has brought national and international attention to, particularly, the winning artists, whose practices continue to extend and expand the potentiality of contemporary art today. The 2014 iteration will no doubt continue that conversation – especially given the nature of this year's selected works, which in themselves challenge the materiality and exchange value of art. To sustain its potency, this event must retain its connection to new practice and to emergent art forms. The *Walters Prize 2014* does just that.

Central to the heart of the project is the desire to stimulate discourse and deepen understanding about the role of contemporary art today. These discussions are ambulant, manifold and important, and were significant in the establishment of the Walters Prize in 2002 by Founding Benefactors and Principal Donors Erika and Robin Congreve and Dame Jenny Gibbs, working together with Major Donor Dayle Mace and Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. This year the Auckland Contemporary Art Trust provides support as a Principal Donor and Elevation Capital joins as a Major Sponsor alongside Founding Sponsor Saatchi & Saatchi. The Gallery is deeply appreciative of the generous contributions made by these individuals, trusts and sponsors, without whom the project would simply not exist. Their interest in debate and understanding is even more important in 2014.

I warmly congratulate the nominated artists for their tireless commitment to the very tough life of a working artist. The four shortlisted artworks are: *All You Need Is Data – The DLD 2012 Conference REDUX* by Simon Denny at Kunstverein Munich, 19 January–10 March 2013 and at Petzel Gallery, New York, 20 June–27 July 2013; *If you find the good oil let us know* by Maddie Leach at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery and off-site, 25 June 2012–14 February 2014; *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam* by Luke Willis Thompson at Hopkinson Cundy (now Hopkinson Mossman) and off-site, 14–31 March 2012; and *Mo'ui tukuhausia* by Kalisolaite 'Uhila from the exhibition *What do you mean, we?* at Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts, 3 March–6 May 2012.

Discussion is paramount in this event: the Walters Prize is collaborative in the selection and the presentation of the artists' projects. The jurors for the 2014 Walters Prize were: Christina Barton, Director of the Adam Art Gallery at Victoria University of Wellington; Anna-Marie White, Curator at The Suter Art Gallery Te Aratoi o Whakatū, Nelson; Peter Robinson, artist and Associate Professor at Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland; and Caterina Riva, Director of Artspace NZ, Auckland (2011–2014). Stephen Cleland, (Acting) Curator, Contemporary Art at the Gallery has negotiated and worked closely with the artists to deliver their projects, while remaining true to the intent and sensibility of each work.

One of the key contributions of the Walters Prize to the wider environment of New Zealand art practice is the network of relationships and conversations triggered by the visiting judge. This year Charles Esche, Director of Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, Netherlands, has accepted the role. Esche heads the curatorship of significant international exhibitions, such as this year's São Paulo Biennial, and has previously led the Riwaq Biennale (Palestine, 2009 & 2007), the 9th International Istanbul Biennial (2005) and the 4th Gwangju Biennale (South Korea, 2002). He is co-founder and co-editor of leading art publisher Afterall Journal and Books. Esche leads the exploration of new territories in art through innovative curatorial strategies; he will bring his significant insight to New Zealand.

This year we have also expanded the discussion by inviting a wider selection of writers to contribute to this publication. I wish to thank Hans-Ulrich Obrist for his smartphone conversation piece with Simon Denny, Mercedes Vicente who has written on Maddie Leach's project, Lauren Cornell for her essay on Luke Willis Thompson's work and Bruce E Phillips for his contribution about Kalisolaite 'Uhila's performance/action. In addition, for the first time, we have included a text from the judge. Esche offers a personal response to the question 'What is art for?'; he discusses how for him, identity is partly constructed through and by art, and notes: 'The art that addresses me with passion and excitement uses a conceptual language that might be called psycho-political to tell me how to rethink my situation and myself.' The situation of the viewer/participant, the situation of the artist, and the situation of the work itself are simultaneously

under consideration here and they are not the same. I once asked Peter Robinson 'What is art for?' and he replied, 'Everything and nothing.' This contemplation of absence and the evolving force of human memory are of particular relevance in considering the grouping of works in this exhibition. Regarding the situation of the artwork itself; Proust suggests a radical notion that 'objects retain something of the eyes which have looked at them'.¹ In quite different ways, each of these artworks offers experiences that help us rethink our situation and ourselves.

This year's selection of artists is particularly interesting as it places interventions and actions at the fore. The reconfiguration of the selected artists' projects within the context of Auckland Art Gallery holds surprises and demonstrates art's powerful protean qualities. Importantly, these works offer an immediate journey into some of the most intriguing, unpromising explorations within New Zealand art practice occurring today.

1. Marcel Proust, *Time Regained: In Search of Lost Time, Vol VI*, translated by Andreas Mayor and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D J Enright, Modern Library Classics, New York, 1993, p 283–4.



What Is Art For?

Charles Esche

Judge, *Walters Prize 2014*

To answer this question in personal terms seems to me to be the only option. I would equally like to describe the result of art in idealistic terms – not to lose criticality but to respond with the conviction that the question demands. In general, art speaks to the level of intimate exchange: its institutions seek to set up a dynamic loop between art and singular individuals, and art's effects, or reason for being, are initially found in this kind of closed circuit. All of which means that, at the most basic level, art is for humans and that, consequently, it constructs a part of their identities as such.

My identity is then partly constructed through and by art. But certain artworks do more than affirm my humanity. They help construct my notions of what is possible, open new vistas of interest and have the potential to change who I am and what I think. These artworks speak most effectively to me, reward my returning gaze and my thought, and stay with me in my mind's eye. What the various artworks that work in this way have in common is not formally obvious. There are no rules that define what 'works' and what doesn't. What they do share is that there is a consequence to looking and thinking about them – a consequence that generates a possibility that was not there before, or was, at least, not available as possibility to me. This seems to me a fundamental justification for art's existence. Without art, we would lose a significant imaginative tool and means of seeing and thinking beyond established boundaries. With that, the intimate address steps beyond intimacy, and has the potential to affect our social relations – how we choose to behave and what we choose to value.

In this way, art can be either the kick-start to or the breakdown of the social production machine. By identifying an interest in art, in general or in particular, an individual sets up a series of social demands for him or herself. Some of these involve a subsequent clustering of interests, a shared theorising and discussion, while others lead to questions of ownership

and property rights. Both of these, in different ways, control the access of others to intimate encounters with art but those intimate moments are themselves greatly enhanced by the social production that goes on around them. Indeed, such clusters of interest are essential if art is to be produced at all, as artists generally rely on, or emerge out of, such groups.

While I claim that art has a significant role in social formation, I am sure that similar logic could be applied to many other forms of human production. What makes art stand out is both the intimate form of its address and its ambiguous relation to the interests that produce it. Art, at least since modernism's beginnings in the 19th century, has been able to distance itself to some degree from the social machine that produces it. It is able, in the name of an individual artist, to speak for itself and its selfish intent to be art and nothing more. So much so that the question – 'What is art for?' – has been historically answered by simply saying: 'Art is for art.' This has the benefit of appearing to give art its own space to become itself but it is, as we see these days, an effective way to allow questions of ownership to become dominant over questions of meaning or social production whenever art takes up a role in the world outside itself. Nevertheless 'art for art' is a concept worth retaining in extreme situations of political or economic instrumentalisation.

To my mind, though, being for itself is not an adequate account of art's role at this moment in time and it does not account in any way for its effect on us. In the end, there is more psychologically and politically at stake. The art that addresses me with passion and excitement uses a conceptual language that might be called psycho-political to tell me how to rethink my situation and myself. When this happens – when your head starts to spin, so to speak – the answer to the question of what art is for is more than clear!

First published in *ArtReview*, 2007, iss 16, p 59

Charles Esche is a curator and writer living between Edinburgh, Scotland, Eindhoven in the Netherlands and São Paulo, Brazil. He is Director of the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven and Co-editorial Director and Co-founder with Mark Lewis of Afterall Journal and Books based at Central Saint Martins, London. Esche is also Curator of the 2014 São Paulo Biennale, with a team of seven curators.

In addition to his institutional curating, Esche has curated and co-curated a number of major international exhibitions including U3 Triennial, Ljubljana (2011); Riwaq Biennale, Ramallah with Reem Fadda (2007 & 2009); Istanbul Biennial with Vasif Kortun (2005); Gwangju Biennale with Hou Hanru (2002); and Amateur Göteborg with Mark Kremer and Adam Szymczyk (2000). He teaches on the Exhibition Studies MRes course at Central Saint Martins and the De Appel Curatorial Course, Amsterdam. From 2000–2004 Esche was Director of Rooseum, Malmö, Sweden and before that held positions at proto-academy, Edinburgh and Tramway, Glasgow.

Esche is a member of the CIMAM board and Chair of CASCO, Utrecht, Netherlands. In 2014 he was awarded the CCS Bard College Prize for Curatorial Excellence, in 2013 the Minimum Prize by the Pistoletto Foundation, and in 2012 he was awarded the Princess Margriet Award for Cultural Change by the European Foundation.

Jury Statement

In determining the most outstanding contribution to New Zealand art since the last Walters Prize, the jurors have selected four artists who have undertaken memorable projects that prove art's traction as a means to engage the social, economic, cultural, technological and environmental realities we collectively face. Each project demonstrates a conceptual grasp of the legacies of art's recent history and a commitment to modes of presentation that challenge expectations and shift attention away from objects to processes and situations. They are all willing to test the boundaries of self and society and to question just where art begins and ends. We believe these artists' practices raise issues that are relevant to our lives, and that they are vitally contributing to and advancing discussions about the nature of art at this time.

Jury Members

Christina Barton

Director of the Adam Art Gallery
at Victoria University of Wellington

Anna-Marie White

Curator at The Suter Art Gallery
Te Aratoi o Whakatū, Nelson

Peter Robinson

Artist and Associate Professor
at Elam School of Fine Arts,
University of Auckland

Caterina Riva

Curator and Director of Artspace
NZ, Auckland (2011–2014)

Simon Denny

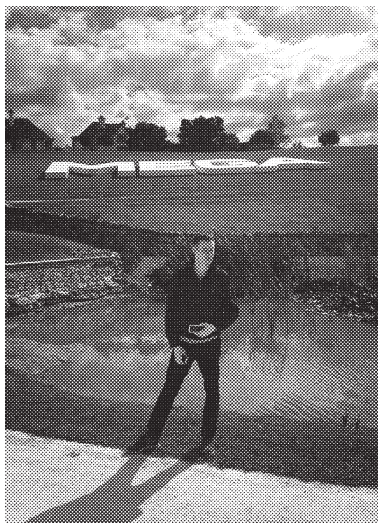
Nominated for:

*All You Need Is Data –
The DLD 2012 Conference REDUX,
2013*

Born: 1982, Auckland, New Zealand

Lives and works: Auckland, New Zealand
and Berlin, Germany

Right: Portrait of Simon Denny in front of
Kim Dotcom's Mansion, Auckland. Courtesy
of the artist and Michael Lett, Auckland.



Jury statement:

In the two years since Simon Denny was a finalist in the last Walters Prize, he has undertaken a string of substantial exhibitions that prove his original contribution to what has come to be known as 'post-internet aesthetics'. Denny's *All You Need Is Data – The DLD 2012 Conference REDUX*, which was presented in Munich and New York in 2013, is a clever visualisation and subtle critique of the hyped-up promises offered by the tech gurus of our digital future. Reusing the aesthetics of the Digital Life Design (DLD) media conference, Denny creates a walk-through sculptural installation that proves just how 'thin' a sound byte actually is.

Maddie Leach

Nominated for:

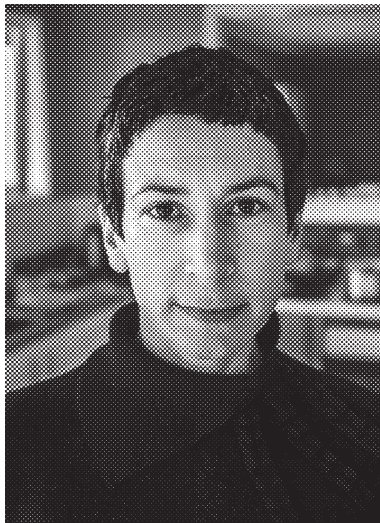
If you find the good oil let us know, 2012–14

Born: 1970, Auckland, New Zealand

Lives and works: Wellington, New Zealand

Right: Portrait of Maddie Leach.

Courtesy of the artist.



Jury statement:

Maddie Leach's intensive but dispersed project, *If you find the good oil let us know* commissioned by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery as its last artist residency before the gallery building closed for major renovations, has slowly unravelled over the full two years of this Walters Prize period. Her work follows an idiosyncratic thread that started with a substance she thought might be whale oil and ended with the relocation of a cube of cement 'made' from recycled mineral oil to the seabed several kilometres off the Taranaki coast. Through this lengthy peregrination Leach managed to draw in scientists, cement workers, sailors, oil-industry executives, the editor of the local paper, staff of the gallery, a dispersed group of writers, and the people of New Plymouth. This is typical of the artist's practice, which arises out of a particular circumstance and is shaped by a lengthy process of embedded enquiry and social interaction.

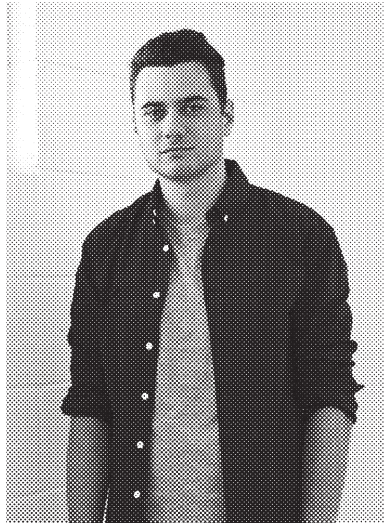
Luke Willis Thompson

Nominated for:

inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam,
2012

Born: 1988, Auckland, New Zealand
Lives and works: Auckland, New Zealand
and Frankfurt, Germany

Right: Portrait of Luke Willis Thompson.
Courtesy of the artist. Photograph by Tash
Hopkins.



Jury statement:

Luke Willis Thompson's bold project for Hopkinson Cundy (now Hopkinson Mossman) deeply shook the set parameters of how art is traditionally experienced and challenged any passive notion of spectatorship. To find the artwork, visitors had to enter a taxi stationed at the empty gallery and, with a palpable sense of unease, set off to an unknown destination, with only the tentative conversation with the driver to break the tense sense of expectation. Arriving at a suburban house, visitors were invited to enter and wander around but not to trespass into the bedrooms. With no people inside, yet signs of habitation everywhere, visitors only gradually came to realise – through closer inspection of school projects, books, and photographs – that this was the artist's family home. In such an audacious situation, the boundaries of exclusion and inclusion, intimacy and voyeurism were completely blurred; the project demanded we consider anew concepts of intentionality, the location of art and how to ascribe meaning or determine value.

Kalisolaite 'Uhila

Nominated for:

Mo'ui tukuhausia, 2012

Born: 1981, Tonga

Lives and works: Auckland, New Zealand
and Nuku'alofa, Tonga

Right: Portrait of Kalisolaite 'Uhila.
Courtesy of the artist.



Jury statement:

In March 2012, Kalisolaite 'Uhila lived homeless for a two-week period in the vicinity of Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts in Pakuranga. The artist intended this as a consciousness-raising exercise drawing attention to the state of homelessness. He was successful in his ambition and the artwork was the subject of intense scrutiny by locals, police and national news media. Undertaken at the start of the Walters Prize period, this subject has only grown in importance, as homelessness, among Polynesian men in particular, has emerged as a pressing issue in Auckland and other urban centres.

As a Tongan-born artist, 'Uhila is broadly concerned with the idealisation of Aotearoa New Zealand as a land of opportunity compared with a reality of minimum-wage factory and seasonal labour. His body of endurance performance artworks undermines these utopian values and holds New Zealand to account for attracting Pacific migrants to support a low-wage, manual-labour strata of the economy. His work speaks vividly to the vulnerable conditions of life for a social underclass in this country.

Simon Denny



Simon Denny

All You Need Is Data – The DLD 2012 Conference REDUX

Stephen Cleland

I have stressed the importance of image populations because I believe image power... is derived from networks rather than discrete objects. This means that works of art must develop ways to build networks into their form by, for example, reframing, capturing, reiterating, and documenting existing content – all aesthetic procedures that explicitly presume a network as their ‘ground’.¹

— David Joselit, *After Art*

David Joselit’s statement could plausibly have been made by Simon Denny to describe the process of developing his Walters Prize work *All You Need Is Data – The DLD 2012 Conference REDUX*. While stretched inkjet canvases and steel railing are Denny’s chosen materials, to borrow the painting analogy Joselit uses in his book *After Art*, the ‘ground’ of Denny’s most ambitious projects is better described as a network of information. In this way Denny’s work parallels a number of practitioners who have been broadly categorised as ‘post-internet’ artists.² This can be seen clearly in Denny’s use of repositories of data to develop a parallel body of artworks. Much like the way hyper-links and webpages encourage the free and open-ended movement of information, these networks provide databanks that can be captured, reframed and reiterated to form expansive installations. But Denny’s choice of source material also differentiates his work from being concerned only with the internet. Instead, he seems to take as his subject all useful forums of data transferral. Data becomes tangible.

The project’s title – *All You Need Is Data* – removes any question from the name of the 2012 *All you need is data? Digital Life Design (DLD)* conference, held in Munich. While similar conferences take place around the

world, the DLD remains one of the primary European forums for addressing annual shifts and advances in technology. In 2012, this high-calibre symposium featured reputable figures who shape the world of technology including Jack Dorsey (Twitter), Jimmy Wales (Wikipedia), Sheryl Sandberg (Facebook), Chris 'Moot' Poole (4chan) and David Karp (Tumblr). Denny used this forum to create the entire contents of his artwork, gaining unlimited access to DLD12 conference presentations from the presenters and rights holders – DLD and Hubert Burda Media. He then copied, cut and pasted at will, and re-edited this information as raw material: 'They liked my idea of doing a very short history, a three-day timeline of the entire 2012 event, presented exactly a year later at the same time as the 2013 event. They also made design files and a copy of the live edit of the HD video that was made of the entire three days available to me. I then simultaneously worked on watching and transcribing the 80 odd hours of footage from the video and extrapolating [a] design and display logic that combined and emphasised elements of the DLD visual identity.'³ Denny's piece, then, forms a full visual summary of the DLD12 through compositions reflecting the aesthetics of the conference: app-like interfaces, interactive clipboards and many, many loud sound-bites.

Denny's 'redux' comprises 90 canvases mounted on a customised steel railing that creates labyrinthine pathways through the gallery. Not unlike navigating a stanchioned airport check-in lobby, our movements through the work become highly controlled, our access to the material staggered as we snake through row by row. Denny explains: 'As a result you get a kind of short visual and textual summary of each of the 89 talks. [While being] a little overwhelmed with the volume of the material, you can also pick and choose your way through the conference – which is a feeling not unlike being there...'⁴ His work forms a mass of information in such a way that the viewer must become the editor.

Denny's promiscuous use of pre-packaged information follows a line of appropriation within contemporary art through to its natural conclusion. '[It is] so commonplace to use images created by other authors to illustrate a point very casually that reusing images in art doesn't feel unusual anymore. It's hard to find art that doesn't do this in some way, either with

objects, images or processes. The way this is done is more important than the act of doing it in itself.¹⁵ His work reflects the contemporary problem of being a sculptor within an information-based economy, and Denny's confidence in shaping this data as a 'material' reveals something about our contemporary age – how these bigger questions about technology shape communication. It also situates this technology within the banality of the everyday. Denny is the last person to give a dry lecture on technology, but he will deliver content in a devastatingly dry manner if it creates a humorous result.

Once we grow accustomed to the laptops, LCD televisions, smart-phones and numerous other screen-based devices in our daily lives, we use them almost unconsciously. As the philosopher Martin Heidegger once said, it's only when something goes wrong with our technologies that the question of function again rears its head – that a device becomes something we once again *perceive* rather than simply *use*. Simon Denny carefully distils such ruptures within our contemporary screen-oriented lives. The monitor reproductions in other exhibitions of his present bodies of information in such a way that we can't access the content without being conscious of its delivery. Denny is attracted to the utility of monitors in an art exhibition as a practical solution for amassing a lot of imagery. But while this is normally taken for granted – monitors being ubiquitous in the art world for their efficient presentation of video imagery, which now represents gigabytes if not terabytes of imaging and sound information – Denny never indulges in a monitor's *use* so much as exploiting its *use value*. His presentation of screen imagery on makeshift reproductions of monitors in the form of stretched canvases seems to simultaneously elevate the monitors as sculpture and cast them into the category of mere packaging. Within this pseudo-critical cast all of us become implicated through our susceptibility to uncritically purchasing the latest Apple iPhone or Samsung Galaxy, Sony Bravura or Samsung Smart TV. As one commentator suggested: 'Denny plays with the conditions in which we identify with data, as purchasers, and as units, ourselves, of profitable data.'¹⁶

1. David Joselit, *After Art*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2013, p 94.
2. The term 'post-internet' is misleading in that it generally refers to a group of practitioners operating in a mature phase of the internet as opposed to referencing the end of the internet and a time after this. It is also distinct from 'net art', which referred to work only located online as opposed to material artworks that result from an explicit appropriation of the logic of webpages. For a fuller account refer to Michael Connor, *What's Postinternet Got to do with Net Art?*, Rhizome, <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/nov/1/postinternet/>, accessed 5 June 2014.
3. Valentina Sansone and Simon Denny, 'Simon Denny Reconvenes', *D/Smagazine* online, published 21 January 2014, <http://dismagazine.com/discussion/57528/simon-denny-reconvenes/>, accessed 5 June 2014.
4. As above.
5. As above.
6. Pablo Larios, 'I Watch TV Alone', in Simon Denny, *Full Participation*, Koenig Books, London, 2013, p 182.

Pages 19, 24–30

All You Need Is

Data – The DLD 2012

Conference REDUX

2013

Installation view at Petzel

Gallery, New York.

Photographs: Jason

Mandella

MONDAY JANUARY

ROAD TO DIGITAL



MONEY AND DATA



FIRESIDE CHAT



REGISTRATION



SOCIAL MEDIA & COMMUNITY



WORLD METROPOLIS



SOCIALIZING BIO



DEMO



CREATIVELY SOCIAL



DIY BIO: CITIZEN SCIENCE



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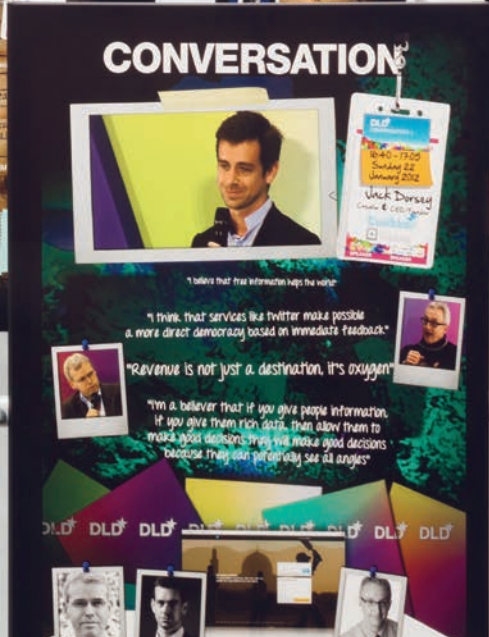


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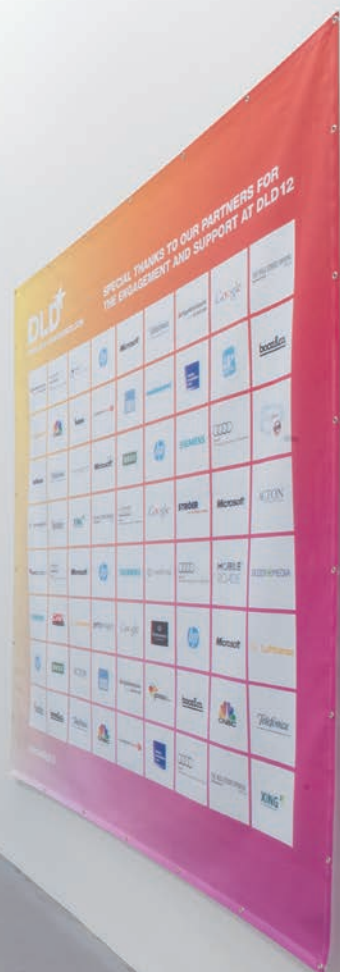


DUE DUE DUE DUE







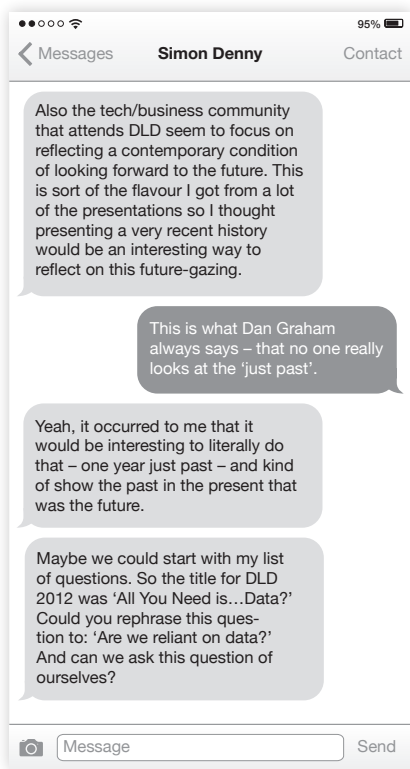
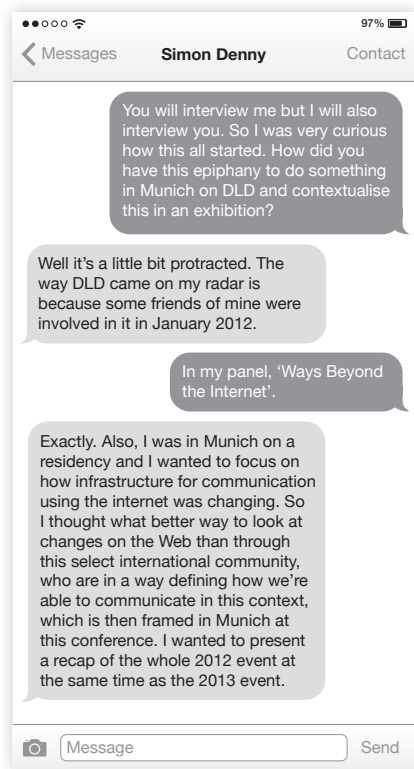


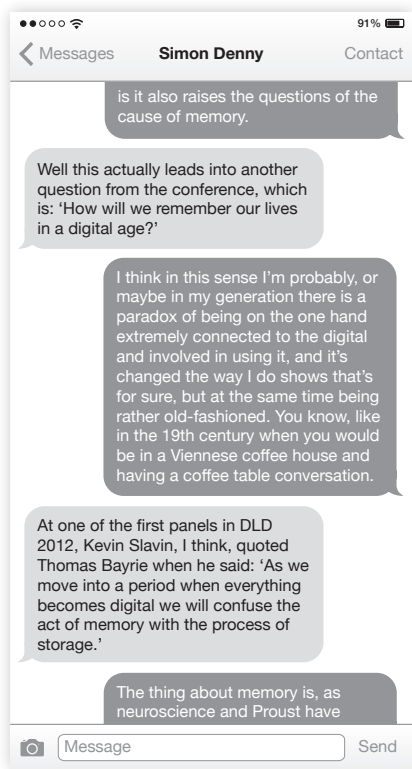
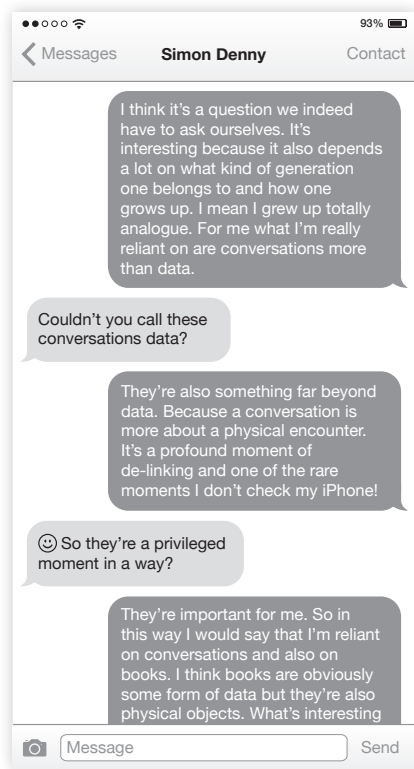


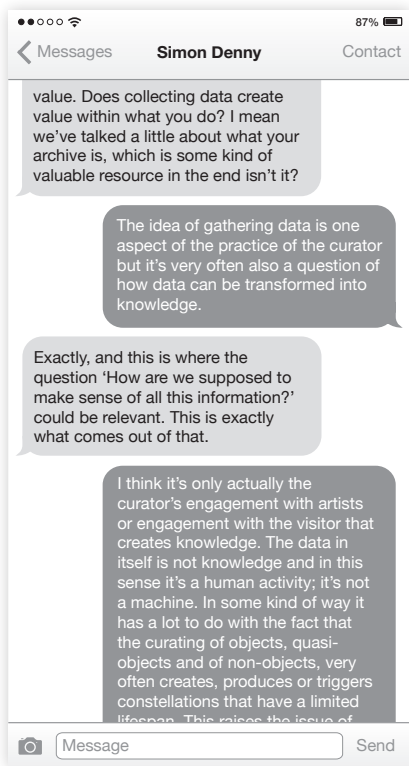
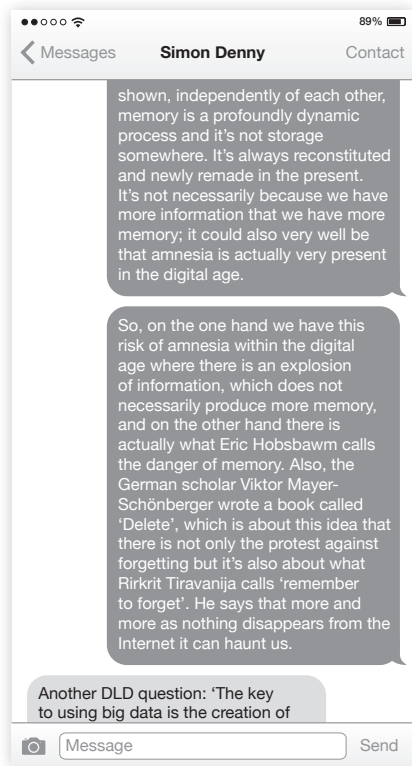


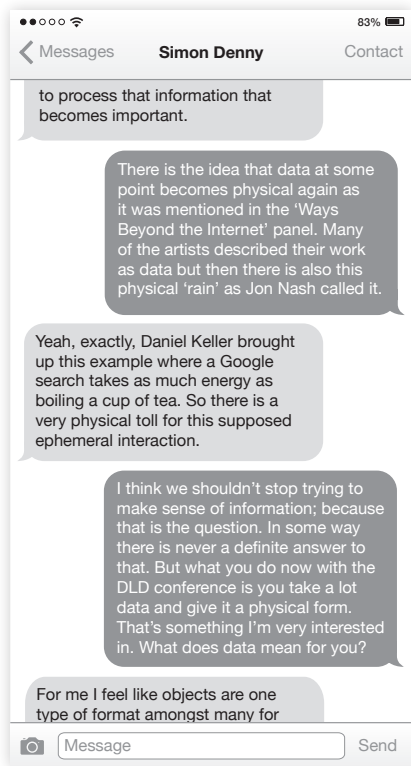
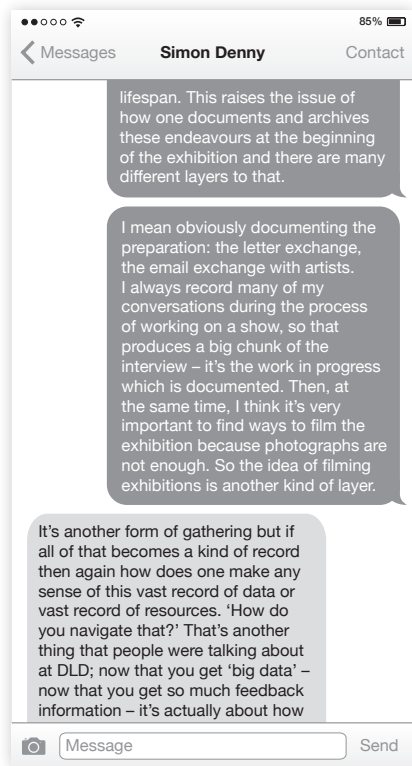


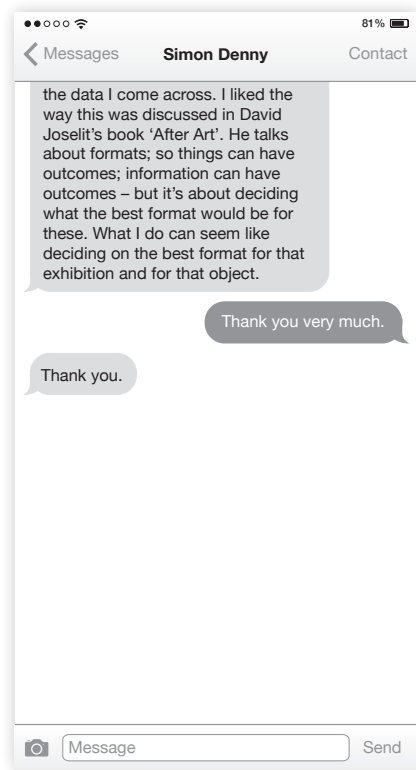
Excerpts from an interview between Hans-Ulrich
Obrist and Simon Denny at the Serpentine Gallery,
London, 15 November 2012











**Hans-Ulrich Obrist,
Co-director of Exhibitions
and Programmes and
Director of International
Projects, Serpentine
Gallery, London**

Full interview first
published in Simon Denny,
*All You Need Is Data – The
DLD 2012 Conference
Redux*, Kunstverein
Munich and Koenig Books,
London, 2013.

Maddie Leach



Maddie Leach

If you find the good oil let us know

Stephen Cleland

Maddie Leach's project *If you find the good oil let us know* possesses an open-ended quality that resists total closure. The work might have reached a 'conclusion' on 16 January 2014, when a 2.4-tonne block of concrete was tipped off a boat 12 nautical miles out to sea. If ever an object couldn't be exhibited for logistical reasons, this block is it, and its journey to the ocean floor could be seen as the final few moments of Leach's project. The publication of the book *If you find the good oil let us know* one month later, comprising a collection of letters written in response to the project by Leach's writing 'companions' and images of the work, may also be seen as the endpoint. However, for the artist, Auckland Art Gallery's exhibition of *If you find the good oil let us know* in the Walters Prize has produced another phase in this unconventional, process-orientated artwork. This new extension of Leach's project occurs well after its initial actioning, but to understand what we see now, in this setting, we need to start at the beginning.

If you find the good oil let us know is rare in the Walters Prize context because Leach was not selected for a gallery-based exhibition. She initiated this project in 2012 during the early stages of a three-month residency at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth and it continued to unfold over a two-year period. At no point was the work conventionally displayed in an art gallery. Excerpts from Leach's letter to the writers she selected to work with in 2012 provide insights into her thinking, reveal the impetus for the project's conception and help trace how it developed:

In April last year... I became the owner of 70 litres of 'whale oil' from a quenching tank when the Engineering School closed down at Massey University in Wellington. I had casually asked Mike and Peter (the two technicians who were about to be made redundant) what the oil in the

tank was. They swore black and blue that it was whale oil, possibly Sperm Whale at that. [...] It was suspected that the oil had been in this tank since at least the early 1960s when it was apparently still commonly sought for quenching processes. Its authenticity was uncertain, and where it came from unknown, but it was plausible. [...] I said I would take it, that I would siphon it out, that I would look after it...¹

Leach's project therefore began in speculation: could this substance really be whale oil?

Whale oil, particularly sperm whale oil sourced from the spermaceti organ in the top of the massive head of the sperm whale, has unique properties. For example, its extraordinary resilience to freezing temperatures, its ability to remain in a fluid state, means it is the lubricant used in the Hubble space telescope, which wheels around Earth seeing and taking images of events that happened up to six billion years ago.² This and many other properties resulted in whale oil being a highly sought after product from the beginning of the industrial revolution to the present day. An infectious belief in the possibility that the barrel Leach took possession of might contain whale oil took hold as she discussed her find with others – 'across my various consultations it seemed we all hoped for "whale" to be revealed'.³ One consultant noted, 'At first glance it sounds like it may be whale oil, as in a pure state it is light gold in colour.'⁴ Another promisingly stated, 'The presence of cholesterol would indicate mammal origin at the very least.'⁵

But a counter position was eventually confirmed in a laboratory finding: it was mineral oil. Those involved at this point were naturally disappointed and, for Leach, this presented a new set of conditions to resolve and a simple question of custodianship – what do you *do* with 70 litres of used mineral oil? Her Taranaki residency research had also pulled into focus the geographic features of New Plymouth – its proximity to the ocean and to New Zealand's only operational off-shore deep sea oil rig. Leach explained in her letter:

My proposition is now one based in a process of equivalencies and transference, and an idiosyncratic one at that: to calculate how much

cement results from 70 litres of oil (as fuel), deliver my barrel to Westport Works, receive the requisite amount of cement after its firing, cast an object with this amount of cement, take this object from Port Taranaki out to sea and drop it into the ocean...⁶

The project found another new form. Processes such as this are typical of Leach's research-based practice, which spans sculpture, conceptual strategies, social and narrative practices and a range of site-specific approaches to art making. But while a site-responsive project will often provide an audience with a direct experience of the work *in situ*, the precise placement of the various stages of this project meant that the public experience would be dispersed. The project involved what Leach described as a process of 'equivalencies and transference', and she elicited the support of a group of writers to respond to what might be called a sculptural proposition:

My purpose as stated is to invite you to write a letter... constituting a speculative narrative for this new work, *If you find the good oil let us know*. As a collection of words and images this document may be the only tangible "result" for the project – given that much of the work will happen elsewhere, or at sea.⁷

Leach's invitation to write a letter was printed first in the *Taranaki Daily News*, New Plymouth's primary newspaper, and responses from her guest contributors followed one by one through January and February 2013. As these letters appeared in the Letters to the Editor section, public interest grew and local readers joined the discussion, writing their own letters to the paper.

Coming back to the present, Leach's extension of her project at Auckland Art Gallery is a way to continue the conversation it has generated in New Plymouth. In this gesture Leach continues to invite alternative forms of engagement with her work. She has made no attempt to create a full documentary account of the project within a familiar exhibition format – collected documents of the work's passage that could have been

displayed in the form of newspaper articles, video and photographs, audio interviews and recordings. For Leach, presenting the project in the form of an archive would weaken the imaginative search that is central to the work, the careful balancing of presence and absence that the Taranaki audience experienced over a longer duration.

Instead, Leach's presentation at Auckland Art Gallery carefully connects audiences to a nexus of materials on-site, online and elsewhere. The book created in conjunction with the project is available in the Gallery bookshop; a second, extended edition created for the Walters Prize is available as a free e-book on the artist's website; and an audio recording of writer Ingrid Horrocks reading her letter is also available online. The other part of the work is a photograph printed across two adjacent broadsheet pages of the *Taranaki Daily News*. Published the day before the Walters Prize exhibition commences, the image depicts a moment of calm after the concrete block had disappeared into the water. The light blue tones suggesting a brief turbulence are the only trace of the block's descent to the seabed. The newspaper can be borrowed and read in Auckland Art Gallery, accompanying its widespread circulation in the Taranaki region.

1. Maddie Leach, 'Letter to Companions', in *If you find the good oil let us know*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, 2014, p 12.
2. Philip Hoare, *The Whale: In Search of the Giants of the Sea*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2010, p 344.
3. Leach, p 15.
4. As above, p 13.
5. As above, p 14.
6. As above, p 17.
7. As above, p 18.

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*If you find the good oil let
us know* 2012–14

Howard's Precast

Concrete, New Plymouth,

25 June 2013

Photograph: Maddie

Leach

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*If you find the good oil let
us know* 2012–14

Govett-Brewster Art

Gallery, New Plymouth,

23 January 2014

Photograph: Bryan

James



OW

Postscript

Mercedes Vicente

With 'whale oil' and a 'concrete block' acting as decoys, Maddie Leach's *If you find the good oil let us know* inserted itself into an economy of existing goods and services and created a network of ex-whalers, cement plant engineers, scientists, writers, transporters, newspaper editors, regional council officials, art gallery staff, harbour masters and shipping workers. These participants *formed* and *constituted* the fabric of Leach's socially oriented work and the *medium* of her artistic investigation. Leach's evocative yet knowingly unrealistic proposition – that the 'whale oil' in its form as a concrete block be (re)turned to the sea – was received with delight as well as resistance when rubbing against the interests of regional councils, newspapers and artistic institutions.

In agreeing to support Leach's project the *Taranaki Daily News* was faced with a sequence of commissioned letters that did not conform to the newspaper's criteria for Letters to the Editor, whose length and level of language are apparently aimed at seven year olds! The newspaper's compliance with the truthfulness of sources was also challenged by Leach's request to not openly disclose the artistic nature of these letters, which included hearsay and fictional content. The paper's editorial acknowledged that 'the "letters" have bent our own rules in much the same way that a howling westerly gale will distort and threaten to dismantle Lye's own controversial wind wand', but concluded with an assertion that art and the newspaper's Opinion page 'should always challenge the mainstream and test the boundaries of our comfort zones'.¹

While the project's engagement with audiences was expansive and generous, with the *Taranaki Daily News*' Letters to the Editor contents reaching a wider Taranaki public and allowing readers to respond with their own letters, it also generated controversy. This was due in part to a level of acrimony directed at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery's forthcoming Len Lye Centre, but also because it produced nothing concrete that could be

consumed by audiences. Further, the project's most visual public manifestation – the title of the work spelled out in bold black letters on the Gallery's façade – was perceived as either firing a provocation in a region whose core economy is oil or as a self-effacing, pointless act with the Gallery already closed for building expansion. As for the Govett-Brewster, how could these two markers of the project's public engagement – the title and Letters to the Editor – be computed in terms of audience numbers for a gallery subsidised by the local government and accountable to its taxpayers?

Yet, *If you find the good oil let us know* was not an institutional critique project. Leach's aim was not to publically expose power relationships and ideological, corporate and economic interests. Rather, by means of negotiating one to one, in response to each situation, the artist proposed another way forward. In the name of 'art', Leach and her project were subsequently afforded concessions that would not otherwise be given. Might we view her project as a tenacious effort to expand everyday constricting conditions which are indiscernible to most and as a means to reassert French poet Paul Éluard's dictum that 'there is another world, but it is in this one'²?

Open, wide-reaching, generous and shared with many through its various stages, Leach's *If you find the good oil let us know* was ultimately both accessible and elusive. Its title, a call for engagement, was speculative and purposefully ambiguous; whatever constituted the *good oil* and *us* was left to be decided by the person reading the phrase. *Us* presupposed an existent community. Yet the ubiquitous *us* was expanded from Leach's initial invitation to a coterie of writing companions asked to engage in an epistolary exchange, to a newspaper-reading public, and to the passers-by of the Govett-Brewster's façade, all operating to shift the meaning of *us*.

If you find the good oil let us know was broad in its allegorical suggestiveness and prosaic in its practical proceedings, precise in its choices, and attracted a latitude of responses. It operated in the realm of life and used a strategy of displacement – social, material, discursive and institutional – that was multilayered. It had twists and turns, dispersions and aspirations; it was polyglot speaking to and with disparate

constituencies, and generated multiple points of contact and entry points. Broadening the scope of the artwork's definition to conception, process, production, material and participation was Leach's strategy to carefully circumvent its consumption and comprehension as a single containable material entity or action.

It is important to recognise that *If you find the good oil let us know* was never exhibited in a gallery. Its nomination challenges our foremost national art prize. For the Walters Prize, *If you find the good oil lets us know* will have an extended life within the *Taranaki Daily News* on 11 July 2014. Fleeting in nature, this extension of Leach's project continues to circulate outside the Gallery and within its original audience in Taranaki. At the artist's request, the newspapers will be delivered to Auckland Art Gallery on the night of the Walters Prize exhibition opening and be available for the taking. The next day, the newspaper will be obsolete. Alongside the printed and online editions of the *If you find the good oil let us know* book, the newspaper's residual image will remain, a poetic trace, if not evidence, in the aftermath of the realisation of Leach's ultraist aspirations.³

**Mercedes Vicente, PhD candidate, Royal College of Art, London,
Darcy Lange Curator-at-Large**

1. Editorial: 'It's Our Job to Challenge Mainstream', published 7 February 2013, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/taranaki-daily-news/opinion/8271234/Editorial-Its-our-job-to-challenge-mainstream>, accessed 10 June 2014.
2. Paul Éluard's original quote in French, 'Il y a assurément un autre monde, mais il est dans celui-ci', *Œuvres complètes*, vol 1, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1968, p 986.
3. As in the Ultraist literary movement initiated in Spain in 1918, which opposed modernism and instead advocated for an aesthetic change that would extend to all arts and to daily life itself.

Luke Willis Thompson



Luke Willis Thompson

inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam

Stephen Cleland

The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light... The art is free, as the saying used to go, 'to take on its own life'.

— Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*¹

Almost 50 years has passed since Brian O'Doherty's famous essay 'Inside the White Cube' appeared in *Artforum*.² In it he compellingly argued that so much Abstract art from the 1950s and 60s would have been impossible without the simultaneous shift in the look of art galleries. Alongside this shift to glistening white rooms, where the gallery is both a formal and conceptual 'frame' for the art, there is a danger that culture 'around' art can be hermetically sealed off from the outside world. Despite the vast developments in art since O'Doherty wrote his essay, the primary activity of contemporary art communities still, paradoxically, takes place within galleries that comprise only subtle variations from the white wall format. We ritualistically maintain the routine of experiencing art where we are cushioned from the realities of life. Luke Willis Thompson's work has a tendency to cut through these comfortable art protocols. *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam*, his first exhibition for a private gallery, achieved this by subverting the expectations of everyone who experienced the piece – from the art curious to the highly initiated.³

The work began as you entered a completely empty gallery. A guide for the artwork appeared and invited the visitor to take a journey which commenced with a taxi ride paid in advance.⁴ According to the artist's instructions, only rudimentary information about this journey was provided and discussed in person. The destination was not named, but we knew that the duration of the journey was 45 minutes and were assured that we

would be returned safely at its conclusion. Within this confounding situation the only promise was that the whole work could not be experienced within the gallery. The work began when we let go of our expectations.

In the Auckland Art Gallery iteration of *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam*, Thompson recreates this empty space as a long, narrow corridor about 30 metres in length. Before we are necessarily aware of what's going on, Thompson is already working on us. The corridor is situated at the entrance of the Walters Prize exhibition and both builds anticipation of the show in general and Thompson's work specifically. His proportioned room has a function of extending the nearby arterial routes within the large, stately Gallery building well into his gallery space. It also creates an extended catch zone or lobby where the taxi driver and gallery attendants meet visitors. Along with fellow Walters Prize nominee Kalisolaite 'Uhila's performance, Thompson's work comprises one of the longest durational artworks to be realised in New Zealand. The taxi will operate continually throughout the three-month exhibition period with groups of up to four visitors per journey. We exit the building back-of-house, past security, through the long loading dock to the waiting taxi.⁵ From the moment we enter the taxi a number of subtle cues unfold in the work. We are led not to the Gallery's preferred taxi service but to a Discount Taxi (specified by Thompson).⁶ The driver leads us down many false tracks out of the city, and for those familiar with Auckland, even though unsure of the destination, the route will appear illogical – like a sly trick on the part of the driver.

In a following essay, Lauren Cornell elaborates on the Victorian villa that is the work's destination; I'd like to reflect on the profound openness in this project. For the duration of the show Thompson's mother and extended family will share their home while it is opened up daily to the art-viewing public. In the wake of the traditions of institutional critique and conceptualism, Thompson continues to develop experimental models for shaping and navigating the social architectures of both the gallery and the home. You cannot experience Thompson's work without feeling a sharp critique of the gentrification of art and the blatant wealth discrepancies between agents of the art world and the city at large. Furthermore, Thompson's strategic deployment of the white cube and deep disruption

of the traditional divide between work and life violently shake up our expectations of art. I am reminded of a lecture about performance art at which American art historian Amelia Jones probed the deep associations that a true unfolding of liveness within a work of art can evoke: 'To engage with live culture actively and with attention is to embrace the conditions of embodied existence, including the inevitability of pain, pleasure and death. To refuse to engage with it is to anaesthetise yourself in order to attain the illusion of immortality. The choice is: dumb yourself to escape fear and live through a plastic life or throw yourself into the culture of liveness. The answer should be clear.'⁷

1. Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, The Lapis Press, San Francisco, 1986, p 7.
2. First published in three separate *Artforum* issues in 1976, O'Doherty's writings were later collated and republished in the book, *Inside the White Cube*.
3. While unconventional in nature the artist informs me that the work was hypothetically able to be bought by POA.
4. The original 'guide' was Hopkinson Cundy director, Sarah Hopkinson. The gallery has now moved from its original Cross Street location and has changed its name to Hopkinson Mossman. For the Auckland Art Gallery version the 'guide' role is assumed by a number of gallery attendants.
5. This unconventional exit represents the artist's echo of the original Cross Street venue, which also featured a loading dock at the entrance.
6. Skype conversation with the artist, 7 April 2014.
7. As quoted in the talk *Amelia Jones & Adrian Heathfield: The Fate of Performance*, Tate Modern, London, 2 October 2004, <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/amelia-jones-adrian-heathfield-fate-performance>, accessed 5 June 2014.







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inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam 2014

Courtesy of the artist and Hopkinson
Mossman, Auckland

Photographs: Jennifer French

inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam

Lauren Cornell

Luke Willis Thompson's works trouble the logic of contemporary art, at times radically shifting the ground on which it is experienced. His works are distinguished by the affecting ways they consider the inescapable negotiations between public authority and private subject, the circulation and repatriation of artefacts, and the ability for physical things to embody histories. In Thompson's work, complex questions are often compressed into ready-mades: impossible objects (places or actions) that are temporarily designated as artworks. His works reveal fault lines in social and symbolic orders – chasms or small fissures where power can be resisted, or at least reimaged, seen more clearly, left undone.

inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam was first staged in March 2012 at Hopkinson Cundy (now Hopkinson Mossman), Auckland. Visitors to the exhibition encountered an empty gallery, and were redirected to a taxi waiting outside. The taxi was from Discount Taxis, a familiar local company; the driver, a Fijian-Indian migrant, introduced himself as Mani. He drove a set route to a private home and waited while visitors entered and walked around, before returning them to the gallery.

The house to which visitors were delivered was (and still is) a family home in Epsom, an affluent, right-leaning and mostly white inner-city suburb of Auckland. This particular house is atypical in the neighborhood. Like its neighbours, it is a villa – a colonial-style house built last century for a burgeoning upper middle class. And yet, unlike the upscale manicured homes around it, it is in a certain state of disrepair, having been unable to keep up with accelerated processes of gentrification. For the duration of *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam*, the house was occupied, but the inhabitants were absent during the visiting periods. Visitors encountered the home as the residents had left it: cluttered with books, old calendars, piles of washing, overloaded kitchen cupboards, a large cat,

decorative objects from the Pacific Islands (in this case Fiji), photographs, some featuring a woman with several darker-skinned children, a father notably absent.

The experience of walking through the home compelled viewers to locate themselves in relationship to the site. The experience raised questions. Is this the kind of house they grew up in? Was this their relationship to the neighborhood? Or is this the house they passed and wondered about or judged? The visitors were dropped into someone else's life but the lack of context – why they were there and whose home it was – forced them to read this other, anonymous person's history through their own. That other, they would come to know, was the artist and the material life of his childhood and teenage years. The house belongs to Thompson's mother, and is where she and some of his family still reside. Yet this was not made explicit, even though clues – residues of old artworks and letters addressed to people who share the artist's last name – were visible. As Mani transported visitors back to the gallery, it was still unclear to them where they had been.

In an international art world, where works pull up roots and travel from museum to biennial to gallery to photographic documentation and on, what does it mean to take the public home? To not comment on biography but rather to encircle the viewer with its messy, unresolved evolution? Here, instead of borrowing an object from life by placing it ready-made into the gallery, *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam* displaces the viewer, borrows their time and being, and brings them ready-made into life. It is a gesture that is, on one hand, utterly plain: they are going to the artist's home. On the other hand, it is confrontational as it appears to level a twinned charge of implication and complicity. A viewer is implicated in the act of entering the private space of another, of intruding, not casually, but as a privileged cultural consumer, complicit in the power imbalances that underlie all self/other relations.

The piece dials up the experience of voyeurism long inherent in Western modernism's treatment of exoticised others, and lays bare social and economic divisions that can be masked in a white cube. New Zealand critic Hamish Win has described the work as the 'repackaging

of the private home as ethno-tourism¹¹ and it does powerfully evoke such dynamics, but the work's lasting power is the deeper questions it asks about biography and located ways of understanding history and art.

A significant element of *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam* is its after-life – almost entirely undocumented (only one or two photographs exist), accounts of the work vary markedly. The work refuses to speak on its own behalf – it is in this sense mute or dumb – but it confounds structural frameworks that would allow others to speak for it. Therefore, *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam* continues on through oral history, with each narrator retelling it through a prism of specific interpretations. Restaged for the Walters Prize exhibition with Auckland Art Gallery as its base, an underlying critique in the piece shifts from the art market to the representational policies and power of museums.

The work's expansive title assists in the project's accrual of meaning in different contexts. The title is a fragment from a sentence in Jacques Derrida's final lecture, 'The Beast and the Sovereign Vol. II', in which, through two texts (Martin Heidegger's 1929–30 lecture courses *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)), he discusses islands, death, burial (the twin fears of being buried alive and not being buried), solitude, the relations of state, colony and the individual, and the question of sovereignty. *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam*'s tripartite phrase references the places of the work (gallery, taxi, home), while referring to one place and encompassing the broader currents of history – cultural, artistic and personal – that course through the work.

Lauren Cornell, Curator, New Museum, New York City

11. Hamish Win, 'Immaterial Transformations', *UN Magazine*, <http://unprojects.org.au/magazine/issues/issue-6-2/immaterial-transformations/>, accessed 10 June 2014.

Kalisolaite 'Uhila



Kalisolaite 'Uhila *Mo'ui tukuhausia*

Stephen Cleland

The Guardian newspaper recently reported public outcry in London at the 'anti-homeless studs' installed on a pavement adjacent to an apartment building.¹ Like the spikes used to deter pigeons from perching on buildings, these studs were positioned to make sleeping on the pavement impossible. It's hard to imagine how such open displays of discrimination towards a social group are tolerable anywhere. But then if Tongan artist Kalisolaite 'Uhila's performance *Mo'ui tukuhausia*² is anything to go by, such an open expression of condemnation is the daily reality for homeless people.

In the New Zealand Census the categorisations of homelessness reveal surprising facts. 'Concealed homelessness' involves people who have no option but to share someone else's accommodation for a temporary or extended period. If someone is forced into 'couch surfing' outside family or friendship networks, their security and wellbeing can be highly compromised. Another type of homelessness involves people living in circumstances not suitable for habitation – be it illegal squatting on private property or spending long periods sleeping in vehicles. It seems, then, that the image of rough sleepers which comes to mind for most people is a visual manifestation of a larger, mostly invisible social problem. Within the homeless community, those sleeping completely without shelter, occupying areas surrounding public buildings, for example, are also at an extreme end of the poverty line. These rough sleepers have specifically either sought refuge within homeless communities as a preference (sometimes leaving abusive situations) or have been forced onto the streets through desperate changes in their life circumstances, often brought about by the loss of a job, extreme financial difficulties and significant personal breakdowns which have resulted in mental health issues and substance abuse.³

'Uhila's performance specifically addresses his own Pacific Island community, many of whom, like him, immigrated to New Zealand for a better

life but have, for one reason or another, entered a different reality. To raise awareness of this community 'Uhila lived entirely as a rough sleeper, relying completely on the benevolence of the public to survive for a period of two weeks in the vicinity of Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts, Pakuranga. This artwork, repeated for the duration of the Walters Prize, references extreme homelessness, but through the quiet sensitivity and humility by which he undertakes this performance, 'Uhila's work also seems to speak to the less-visible homeless within Auckland.

'Uhila restages his performance at the Gallery during the winter months. While Auckland is sub-tropical, at this time of the year the temperature can dip below freezing point overnight – far from the comparative comfort of 'Uhila's tropical homeland, Tonga, where he has lived for the past year. Rather than accepting a *per diem* over the course of his performance, which is standard policy for visiting artists in a public art gallery, 'Uhila has instructed the Gallery to make a donation to a City Mission of its choosing. Similarly, any money or food donations above his core requirements for living are donated to the Auckland City Mission. 'Uhila's direct engagement with the homeless community shares a connection to recent live artworks referred to as relational art or social practice. There is a pilgrimage quality to 'Uhila's work – one that maintains an extraordinary optimism for art's capacity to enact change within a given place. However, 'Uhila's political agency is developed simply through occupying space in a specific way.

Along with these contemporary reference points *Mo'ui tukuhausia* also carefully recalls earlier modes of 1970s and 80s performance. By using himself as exclusive subject, 'Uhila's is in many ways the ultimate endurance-based performance. Connections to the New York-based artist Tehching Hsieh, who declared in 1981 that he would 'stay OUTDOORS for one year', are often made.⁴ Like Hsieh, 'Uhila radically exits his normal routines during the performance, largely deferring contact with his young family. However, while Hsieh and many other artists of his generation were highly dependent on documentation to communicate their works, 'Uhila's work is far from being a performance for the camera. He chose not to self-document *Mo'ui tukuhausia* and therefore not to work with

Auckland Art Gallery to exhibit the work as video or photographic material. The only option available was to restage the performance and allow the artist to live onsite.

The shift from south-east to central Auckland in this restaging is also a move towards a concentrated community of rough sleepers. In the initial project, 'Uhila encountered one person sleeping rough. Unknown to anyone previously, this individual had adopted a daily routine of turning up after dark and leaving before dawn, camouflaging himself within bushes for extra security. The Walters Prize version of the work situates 'Uhila within a notoriously territorial community of people where he will be one homeless person among many.

The ability of 'Uhila to effect change involves both external and internal relationships, and such conditions and challenges are part of the long history of performance art. It is said that the curator Harald Szeemann thought Carolee Schneemann's idea of moving into Kunstverein, Cologne in 1970 and sleeping within her installation such a good idea that he decided to bring in his own 'cot' and join her (to the shock of his colleagues).⁵ More recently, Lee Mingwei's *Sleeping Project* series requires museums to similarly accommodate the artist and his many audience-collaborators sleeping onsite overnight for the duration of the exhibition.⁶ For Auckland Art Gallery, 'Uhila's feat has also required many people's participation: from the Gallery's security guards who monitor him 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to the direct involvement with the Auckland City Mission and local police. If any aspect of the performance falls down, it will represent a failure within our community.

1. The Guardian, 'Anti-homeless Studs at London Residential Block Prompt Uproar', http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/jun/07/anti-homeless-studs-london-block-uproar?CMP=fb_gu, accessed 10 June 2014.
2. The artist explained that the title *Mo'ui tukuhausia* did not just mean 'homeless' but 'no home'. The title refers not only to a physical state but also a mental one. For 'Uhila it describes: 'Not belonging, coming to a dead end and being helpless; not protected, not able to defend yourself and unable to do something to make a situation better.' Email correspondence, 11 June 2014.
3. Information primarily sourced in conversation with Diane Robertson, CEO of Auckland City Mission, 16 April 2014.
4. Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance* (Outdoor Piece), 1981–2.
5. David Levi Strauss, 'The Bias of the World: Curating After Szeemann & Hopps', in *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating*, Apexart, New York, 2007, p 22.
6. Lee Mingwei, *The Sleeping Project*, 2000.

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Mo'ui tukuhausia 2012
 From the exhibition *What do you mean, we?* at Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts, 3 March–6 May 2012
 Photographs: Bruce E Phillips











A Voice for the Voiceless

Bruce E Phillips

Kalisolaite 'Uhila told me that time stopped the day he began his performance work *Mo'ui tukuhausia*.¹ For Te Tuhi staff the passing of time was altered too – the fortnight that followed that first day moved remarkably slowly. We were kept busy moment to moment facilitating a food bank, answering questions and deflecting verbal abuse. Two years on, it still strikes me as a period that feels much longer than it actually was. Perhaps this is because of 'Uhila's profound ability to induce such an intense situation through a remarkably humble action.

I first met 'Uhila in 2011, while researching for the exhibition *What do you mean, we?* (2012). The exhibition explored the psychology of prejudice through the work of artists who employ strategies that draw out, or unveil, latent bias. 'Uhila's emerging practice at the time fitted well into this context, so I arranged to meet with him to explore the possibility of his inclusion. I learnt that he used an experiential approach in his work, rather than the head-in-book style of research which is so much more common these days with university graduates. 'My library is my heart and my mind,' he would later tell me.² At the time of that first meeting, 'Uhila was engaging in participatory research which involved spending the odd day or night unkempt and 'living' on the street. On one such day, 'Uhila attempted to enter Auckland Art Gallery, and was promptly ushered out. Being turned away was an important experience for the artist, because at this time he was working as an afterhours security guard down town and was himself often required to move homeless people off private property.

'Uhila's institutional critique was not lost on me and my colleagues when we accepted the risk of allowing him to 'live homeless' around the grounds of Te Tuhi. His action challenged Te Tuhi's core function and could have rendered the organisation politically vulnerable – as well as liable for his safety. However, 'Uhila's inclusion in *What do you mean, we?*

was essential. His was the only live performative work to engage with the public and place of Pakuranga – the suburb in which Te Tuhi is situated. This engagement was one of the exhibition's driving motivations, due to recent issues of discrimination in the area.³

While 'Uhila was made aware of the local social situation, the reality of his bearing witness to these tensions was something else entirely. On a daily basis the artist's presence ignited responses worthy of a 1950s social science experiment in which the very best and worst of our local constituents were uncovered. 'Uhila was referred to as 'that thing!' by one visitor; spat on by another; and was even accused of not smelling enough of 'urine and faeces'. Simultaneously, visitors donated so much food to 'Uhila that regular visits to the Auckland City Mission were required to offload the generous excess. Overall, the most accepting people were children, who would come bounding up to 'Uhila uninhibited, while the initial reaction of many adults was a suspicious double glance.

One surprising element of these responses was that 'Uhila made no assertive effort to elicit any reaction at all. He was merely being. This deceptively simple endurance brings to mind Marina Abramović's 2010 work, *The Artist is Present*, to which individuals reacted with everything from tears to indifference when seated across a table from the artist and fixed by her gaze. 'Uhila, like Abramović, was a silent, still presence onto which people projected their own thoughts and feelings.

'Uhila experienced brief moments of respite when family, friends and supporters visited him, but was, for the most part, left alone to linger day and night in the open. This required 'Uhila to develop an intimate knowledge of the area: he sought shelter from the rain and wind, found warmth in patches of sunlight between buildings, discovered reliable caches of aluminium cans that earned him cash which he then donated to charity and, above all, he located safe nooks in which to hide. Through this deeply attuned observation 'Uhila gained a perspective on the workings of society passing around him. He recounts:

A key aspect to survival is to be aware of your surroundings... I was doing a lot of sitting, a lot of observing, just listening and being aware

of what was happening around the area... I would notice life happening like clockwork... but it is more like a shadow of time. People had the time but I was moving in their shadow. They would be moving but I was moving at my own different pace.⁴

'Uhila further explained that through his art he wants to 'have a voice for those who are voiceless'.⁵ His voluntary homelessness was not, therefore, motivated by a desire to act destitute; it was instead an attempt to attain a perspective similar to that of a homeless person to whom society pays little sincere attention. In this respect, 'Uhila joins a legacy of artists, including Tehching Hsieh, William Pope.L, Santiago Sierra and Krzysztof Wodiczko, to name a few, who have made works in response to the contemporary escalation of homelessness. These artists, like 'Uhila, ventured down this path accepting any controversy that their actions triggered so that they might draw attention to an issue that is readily swept under the carpet. In doing so, the artists themselves risked becoming the subjects of public ridicule, albeit in small measure compared with what the homeless endure daily.

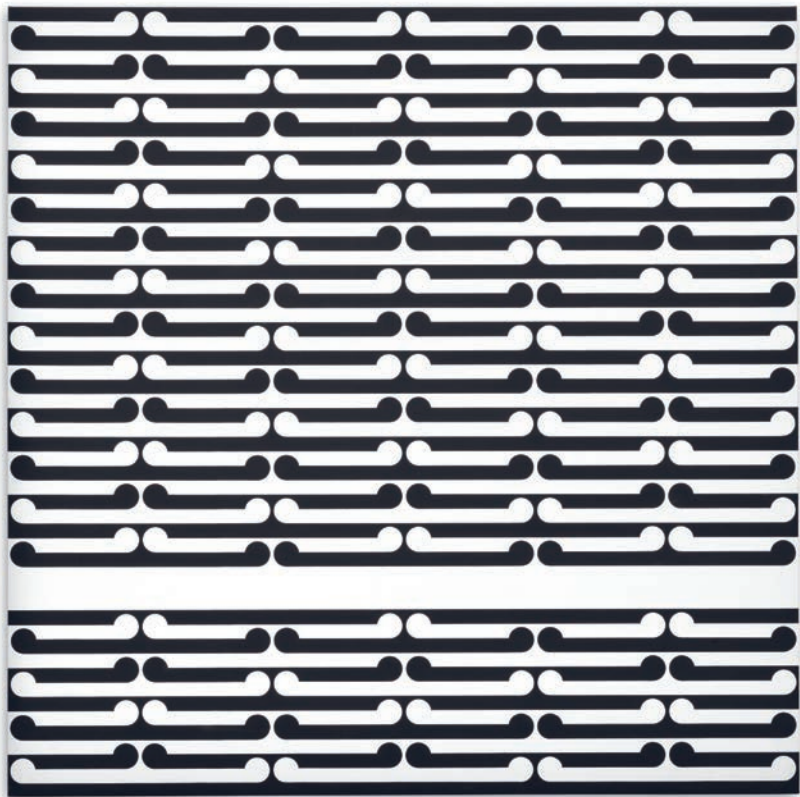
'Uhila was motivated to gain a lived understanding of homelessness, but it was the provocation of his performance that triggered the enforcement of social order. As the title of the work implies,⁶ the action placed him outside what is socially acceptable, and due to this he was deemed an 'unusual suspect', someone to be corrected.⁷ This reality was evident through the many police visits he received, which were the reason his performance ended a day earlier than its planned conclusion. 'Uhila's performance ultimately illustrated that society's power is to be celebrated for how it benefits the collective, but also feared for how it forces individuals to conform.

Artworks such as *Mo'ui tukuhausia* are knowingly problematic for museums and art galleries to facilitate because there is no way of really gauging what might unfold. There may not be anything to see, as such, because the expectations of a conventional viewer experience are put to the side in favour of the artist engaging with the given public context. Nominated for Auckland Art Gallery's Walters Prize at a time when the

central city is experiencing an increase in numbers of homeless people, great emphasis is likely to be placed on the relevance of 'Uhila's work in the new but familiar social situation in which he is invited to engage.

Bruce E Phillips, Curator, Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts, Pakuranga

1. Bruce E Phillips, 'Discussing *Mo'ui Tukuhausia*' in *What do you mean, we?*, Bruce E Phillips and Rebecca Lal (eds), Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts, Auckland, 2012, p 47, <http://www.tetuhi.org.nz/downloadfile.php?filename=files/downloads/What%20do%20you%20mean%20we.pdf>, accessed 21 May 2014.
2. As above, p 52.
3. In 2011, Pakuranga was one of three areas throughout New Zealand chosen by the Right Wing Resistance to distribute their 'Asian Invasion' pamphlets. Other moments of controversy included strong Pākehā resistance to a whare wānanga (house of learning) to be rebuilt in Howick, and also the area's new Super City ward being named after the prominent Māori Chief Te Irirangi. See TVNZ One News, 'Anti-Asian Leaflets Leave Community "Very Alarmed"', 11 May 2011, <http://tvnz.co.nz/national-news/anti-asian-leaflets-leave-community-very-alarmed-4166648>, accessed 20 May 2014; TVNZ *Te Karere*, 'Ngai Tai in Howick Demolish Te Umupuia Meeting House', uploaded 18 October 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3963bBGlwjs>, accessed 21 May 2014; TVNZ *Te Karere*, 'Ngai Tai Iwi Are Happy a Ward in Auckland Will Be Called Te Irirangi', uploaded 22 March 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpnTUGBYtU8>, accessed 21 May 2014; Lincon Tan, Howick: Name Game Over – Now Who Will Lead', *New Zealand Herald*, 25 August 2010, http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10668616, accessed 21 May 2014.
4. Phillips, pp 47–8.
5. As above, p 52.
6. *Mo'ui tukuhausia* translates as 'life put aside'.
7. Phillips, p 50.



Gordon Walters (1919–1995)
Genealogy 5 1972
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
gift of Dame Jenny Gibbs in honour
of Chris Saines, Gallery Director
(1996–2013)

 the
walters
prize

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