



Above: Imogen Taylor, *Sapphic Fragments*, Hocken Collections, 2020. Photo: Richard Munro and Alex North

Right: Jim Cooper, *The Cellophane Circus presents Cut Grass*, Brett McDowell Gallery, 2020. Photo: Robyn Maree Pickens

DUNEDIN

As an art writer who reviewed online exhibitions during lockdown, I found the experience of returning to physical galleries and interacting with artworks one of heightened sensory embodiment. I was able to apprehend artworks as a corporeal being – alert to scale, relationships between works, and materiality. Although these attributes are possibly too broad to cohere the three exhibitions I discuss below, in our Level 1 world I am still seduced by the materiality of artworks in particular, and each of these exhibitions deploys the matter of art making in deliberate ways.

The use of hessian by Imogen Taylor in *Sapphic Fragments* at the Hocken brings together several significant themes in her practice: modernism (some modernists, including cubists, used hessian), regionalism (the rough fibre evokes traditional farming materials such as sacks) and queerness (the texture seems subversive in relation to the formal properties and colour palette of Taylor’s paintings). In *Sapphic Fragments*, the artist’s exhibition as the 2019 Frances Hodgkins Fellow, Taylor queers the frame. Here I am not only referring to the slant, parallelogram canvases, which can be positively described as queer, but to the exhibition’s specifically queer conceptual frame, which seeks to recuperate the intentional silences, wilful elisions and invisibilising erasures of especially lesbian artists in the modernist era.

With the exhibition’s title, Taylor acknowledges the fragmentation and losses of works and identities by lesbian artists, while simultaneously attempting to reclaim and make visible the lives and loves of three New Zealand artists whose sexual identities have been obscured: Frances Hodgkins, A Lois White and Dorothy K Richmond. Taylor includes a work by each artist that foregrounds lesbian desire and relationships, in presentations that could be described as variously explicit, documentary and coded. As queer theorist Judith Butler has famously noted, frames are operations of power, and this curatorial frame centres and reclaims lesbian/queer presence and eroticism. In Taylor’s own paintings, queerness is present in the formalist arrangement of shapes – how and where they intersect – in the intentional variability of colour consonance and dissonance, and in the butchness of hessian.

The materiality of objects and artworks (be they found or meticulously recreated) to produce new environments of the ‘artificial ordinary’ constitutes the installation practice

of Emily Hartley-Skudder. For *Additions + Alterations* at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, curator Lauren Gutsell approached Hartley-Skudder to see if she would be interested in creating environments for eight works from the gallery’s contemporary collection. The outcomes are elegant and uncanny, beguiling and unnerving. The environments or showroom displays created by Hartley-Skudder include bathrooms, living rooms and a bedroom. Real objects are incorporated – hand basins, a bed, a couch – but these are installed alongside signifying objects, such as a suggested bedside table (like a bas-relief), which produces an overall flatness. This flatness in turn produces, or perhaps identifies, a sense of the artificial that interests the artist as she dislocates the familiarity of domestic spaces. Each environment is nuanced in relation to the artwork it holds – Hartley-Skudder is a careful reader of, and responder to, individual aesthetics. Of all the artists included, the most complementary dialogue is that between Yvonne Todd and Hartley-Skudder, and the results of this pairing are suitably disarming and claustrophobic. Hartley-Skudder’s pared-back environment of wall decor and two decorative hand basins for a many-figured painting by Kushana Bush is another successful response.

The contrast between Hartley-Skudder’s environments and Jim Cooper’s sculptural installation at Brett McDowell Gallery could not be starker. Primarily known as a ceramic artist who creates outsized installations of multitudinous offbeat figures, Cooper, in the exhibition *The Cellophane Circus presents Cut Grass*, also includes cut grass. Alongside, there is an actual lawnmower, and strings of giant beads cascading down the gallery’s windowfront and hitched to one wall. This is just the beginning. The main gallery space has little standing room, as is it filled with innumerable gnomic, papier-mâché and fabric figures with giant eyes, pointy noses and syrupy lips. These garish denizens are everywhere: on plinths, platforms and on the floorboards. Some lead a dog on a leash, some relive terrifying hallucinations, others revel in an inner ecstasy. All figures and objects are bright, perhaps none more so than the fabric-on-board works that use lurid, psychedelic-coloured pieces of coiled or ruched fabric to manifest visionary or suffering figures. These proclaim mantras that are incorporated as text alongside their spindly bodies. Allen Ginsberg, for example, is reimagined as a blue figure with a third eye on his head, exalting “EVERYTHING IS HOLY”.
/ Robyn Maree Pickens

Succession, addition, alteration

Collaborations by visiting artists to Dunedin twist context and reframe the domestic.

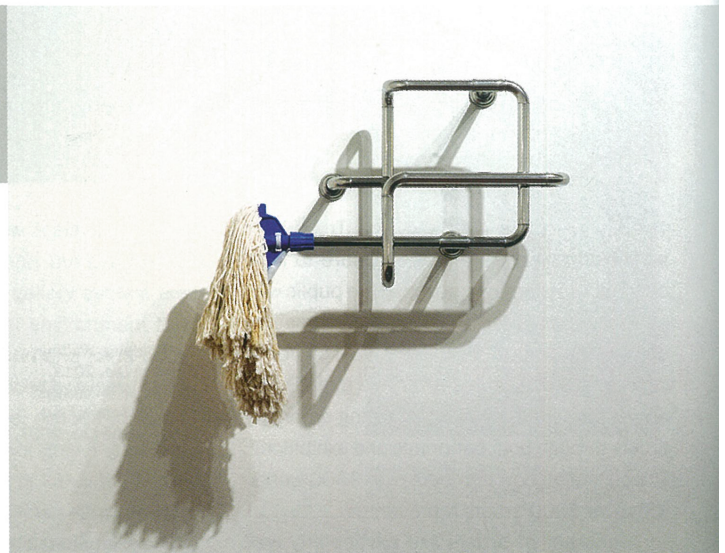
For over two decades the Dunedin Public Art Gallery has run an annual Visiting Artist Programme (VAP), offering both a residency and exhibition outcome to two artists, one from Aotearoa New Zealand and one from overseas. Yona Lee was the gallery's Aotearoa New Zealand Visiting Artist for 2020, with her 12-week residency culminating in the exhibition *Succession*, currently on at the gallery until 25 October. The VAP provided Lee with the support, time and space for a focused period of research and development, allowing her to explore new ideas and experiment with properties such as line, form, scale and material. With the ambition to move beyond



the large-scale installations that had defined her recent exhibitions, *Succession* presents a suite of 23 sculptures – a series of adapted and discrete forms linked by the consistent use of cut, bent and welded stainless-steel pipe. The inclusion of objects drawn from domestic or urban environments, such as light shades and bulbs, tables, brooms, mops and handrails,

Right: Yona Lee, *Succession No.16*, 2020, mop and stainless steel. Courtesy of the artist and Fine Arts, Sydney

Below left: Yona Lee, *Succession* (installation view), 2020, objects and stainless steel. Courtesy of the artist and Fine Arts, Sydney



provides another point of difference – reflecting specific actions, functions and locations. In this exhibition, Lee has been able to explore the potential of working in series – of producing an accumulated sculptural language that allows for nuanced and accentuated variances to be explored across multiple forms. Within the VAP, the Dunedin Public Art Gallery will be working with Scott Eady, Sonya Lacey and Paemanu – Ngāi Tahu Contemporary Visual Arts over the next 18 months.

Alongside the VAP, the Dunedin Public Art Gallery has commissioned a range of new work from artists that will populate the exhibition programme throughout 2020 and beyond. *Additions + Alterations* is an exhibition that, by using the notion of reframing or repositioning as a thematic tool, brings new work by Wellington-based artist Emily Hartley-Skudder together with a selection of works from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery's contemporary collection. Here, each collection work sits within an environment designed by Hartley-Skudder, conceived specifically for that work. These interventions subvert and reframe

the gallery's typical aesthetic, drawing on Hartley-Skudder's interests in design language and the domestic, notions of representation, commodification and the artificial or constructed. From bathrooms to formal living-rooms, Hartley-Skudder's installations ask viewers to question the impact of context – allowing us to see works by Nick Austin, Kushana Bush, Steve Carr, Fiona Connor, Michael Parekōwhai, Yvonne Todd, Erica van Zon and Kawita Vatanajyankur occupying her peculiar, polished and eccentric world.

In August 2020 the Dunedin Public Art Gallery will open *Ayesha Green: Wrapped up in Clouds*, the first instalment of *Suite 20/21*, a two-part exhibition programme that focuses on contemporary artists working in Ōtepoti Dunedin. Ayesha Green (Ngāti Kahungunu, Kāi Tahu), who has been based in Ōtepoti Dunedin since shifting south for an artist residency at Blue Oyster Art Project Space in 2018, has produced a new suite of paintings and mixed-media works. *Wrapped up in Clouds* will explore various modes of describing the landscape through both written and visual language, focusing on the way in which landscape becomes a site of cultural performance. Investigating these performances through her works, Green reverses the gaze, posing an alternative description of the landscape grounded in her own critical inquiry. *Suite 20/21: Part 2*, which opens in March 2021, includes work by Octavia Cook, Ed Ritchie, Justin Spiers and Alexandra Kennedy.

Yona Lee: *Succession* and *Additions + Alterations* are at Dunedin Public Art Gallery until 25 October. *Ayesha Green: Wrapped up in Clouds* is from 29 August to 29 November. dunedin.art.museum



Yvonne Todd, *Founding CEO*, 2008, lightjet print, and Emily Hartley-Skudder, *Staging Your Comeback*, 2020, mixed media including wall paint, PVC wall stickers, found carpet, found and fabricated furniture