

# In the Studio with New Zealand artist Erica van Zon

FEBRUARY 21, 2018 *By* intsculpturectr *in* IN THE STUDIO *Tags:* GRACELEE LAWRENCE [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)



Banh-Mi. Photography: Richard Wotton, Courtesy of the Sarjeant Gallery, Te Whare o Rehua, Whanganui.

Erica van Zon is a multimedia artist based in Wellington, NZ working between a variety of media and taking inspiration from local histories, popular culture, jumble sales, and everything in between. She was gracious enough to share about her process, relationship to nostalgia, research, and more.

GL: Talk a bit about your interests in materials and processes, particularly in relation to craft and scale.

EVZ: I've always been a maker and always found inspiration in the world around me, I'm obsessed with recreating and re-presenting what I see. I think I've got a pretty straight forward way of expressing this with craft based materials and processes (I love plain, accessible materials) but then it gets skewed, I start to get addicted to certain way of making. For example, working with wool tapestry to represent something abstract and then it becomes more representational and I start to think in tapestry. Scale-wise, I always have some sort of logical strategy such as the scale that something is in real life, working 1:1, or photocopying a pattern to reduce it to half its original size...



Opal Moon Local Lime. Courtesy the artist.

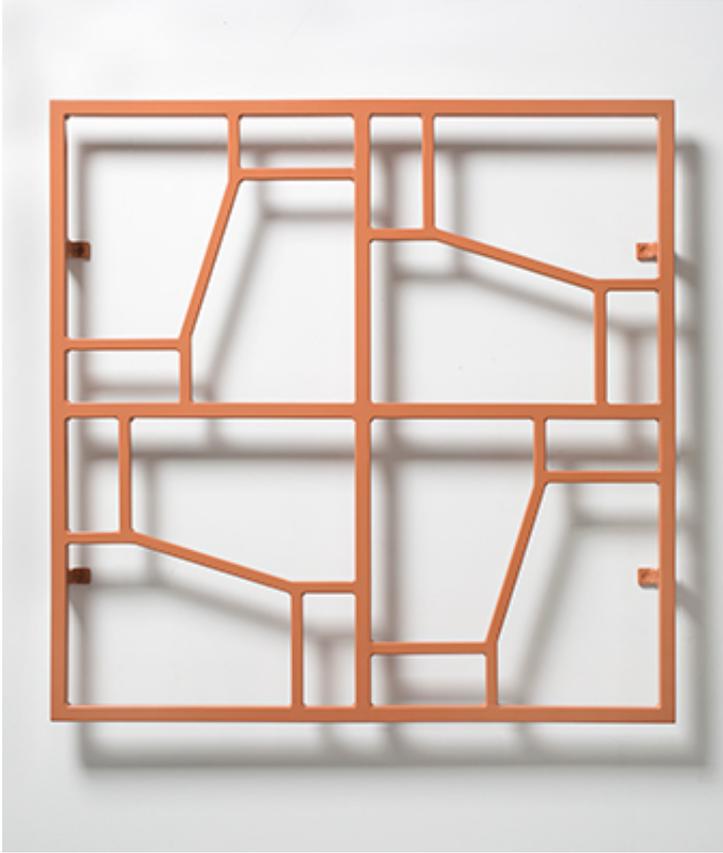
GL: Your work is heavily informed by history and in some ways steeped in nostalgia: how do you think about these two ideas? Secondly, what does your research process look like?

EVZ: I prefer to look back rather than forward, using known imagery or references, there is a certain bond, or collective memory between me and the viewer/s. By employing recognisable motifs or imagery we can find our own thoughts and narratives within the work. It's not a blank slate. I'm a nostalgic person, I'm always going over the past in my head rather than planning for the future. I like flicking between different time periods and showing the links I make within the soup of the past and the now. Perhaps there's a safety in that.

I start off with cyclical or scattered thoughts about a "thing", research it as much as I can, and if the thought sticks, I'll go with it, draw it out and start creating. I spend a lot of time thinking about how to render it through materials, using the most obvious (to me) to start with. I use the internet a lot for conceptual and fabrication research, and the odd book.

I'm not a visible process person, I don't want to show you the mess I've made. My process is very direct. I love the behind the scenes documentation I've made over the years; workbooks, Instagram feed photos etc. that's where the testing happens, ideas evolve and placeholders I can return to. I spend a lot of time making, whilst I'm working on one thing I'm researching the piece 2 steps down the line.

GL: When we met in Wellington, NZ you mentioned that for every exhibition you will either activate the floor or the wall, but never both. How did you conceive of this formula? From your exhibition Opal Moon, Local Lime, it seems to be a most effective approach.



Terracotta Steel Frame. Photography: Richard Wotton, Courtesy of the Sarjeant Gallery, Te Whare o Rehua, Whanganui.



Hoi An Temple Tile. Photography: Richard Wotton, Courtesy of the Sarjeant Gallery, Te Whare o Rehua, Whanganui.

EVZ: I realized that I made 2D sculpture, and everything had a back to it that I didn't want seen, hence the low plinths from about 2013. If you claim or ignore spatial features in a room then you can navigate your whole project more easily, and focus the audience. Working with rules makes the process smoother. You can break the rules of course, use rules that are true to your practice and you'll have a place to start thinking about the reading of your work. With "Opal Moon, Local Lime" I wasn't able to access the gallery easily so I decided everything would be on the walls or on specialty made shelving/racks and able to fit any space. The show "Coffee Perhaps" was based on the way that Helen Hitchings (an early New Zealand gallerist) managed her space, with salon hangs, furniture in the middle of the room and painted walls. What's really important is for the space to feel welcoming.

GL: Do you also have particular approaches about color and scale? In Opal Moon, Local Lime it seemed like red played a particularly important role.

EVZ: It's so strange, once a conservator who was helping me install was saying "I love how you use colour" and I explained it was simply what the things were in real life. I do a lot of colour matching. The red grid in "Opal Moon, Local Lime" was in my urban and domestic environment in different ways at the same time, so it just felt right to use it formally and conceptually. Scale-wise I had a different logic in this show, I just used a meter as a rule for the steel works (also so they fit in the car and could be lifted by 1 person.) The Hoi An Temple tile was just scaled up from the real tile I measured in Hoi An. Most other works were scaled to how you'd approach the actual things in real life.



Work detail. Courtesy the artist

GL: Your work seamlessly integrates handwork and machined fabrication, reflective and matte surfaces, and carefully chosen colors to create lush, carefully constructed environments. Do you find tension in the dichotomies and if so how do you navigate it?

EVZ: Yes, I think there is a tension there, when I first started outsourcing (a big step) I chose to see it my work as a whole as handmade. It's been a real revelation to outsource making, otherwise I'm wasting time and resources, I can't rule a straight line to save my life! I'll try a new process 10 times before I get it right. As a by-product I've also now got agency to use some second hand or old stock materials in my work. In installing "Opal Moon" I've really enjoyed testing out taste level and working with formally placing matching and mismatching works against each other. I love the different combos of materiality, but repeated around the room, and I love a power clash.

GL: What is your summary of the art scene in NZ in one sentence?

EVZ: An outwardly-looking internationally-connected community making cutting edge art in the South Pacific.

To learn more about Erica visit [www.ericavanzon.com](http://www.ericavanzon.com) (<http://www.ericavanzon.com>)

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