

## Representation

**IN THE 1990s**, it seemed as if something got into the air around the genteel anglophile city of Christchurch, and produced a school of painters working in styles that breached many of the rules of 'good' painting, and the sanctity and decorum of 'fine' art. Many of the painters involved knew each other, as fellow students at the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts and admired the work of maverick Lyttelton artist Bill Hammond. They adopted both techniques and subjects from aspects of popular culture, including illustrations, cartoons and music, 'bad' art and (most evident in the work of Saskia Leek) kitsch. They also drew on a range of emotions and sentiments pertaining to the banalities of contemporary life, as well as to raw and embarrassing feelings, heightened moods and memories (S raphine Pick).

Several exhibitions during the mid-late 1990s—such as *Hangover*, curated by Lara Strongman in 1995—brought together the work of artists who exemplified these new 'funky' figurative tendencies. The term 'pencil case school' was sometimes applied to their work, to suggest that it has as much in common with 'non-art' or untutored modes of picture-making, as it does with the history of 'fine' or 'high' art. More recently, outside of Canterbury, a cartoon style is evident in Ayesha Green's portraits of wh nau (family) and ancestors, and Laura Williams's bucolic and erotic pastoral scenes.

A more long-standing and still conspicuous approach to representational painting is the simplified, often expressive or illustrative, style of artists such as Jacqueline Fahey, Robyn Kahukiwa and Euan Macleod. Here, detail or finesse is sacrificed for direct communication of a message, emotion or narrative.

Fine drawing skills underpin the paintings of Kushana Bush and Diane Prince, while others demonstrate accomplished paint-handling in the traditional subjects of still-life (Joanna Margaret Paul and Jude Rae) and landscape (Douglas Badcock, Austen Deans, Dick Frizzell and Grahame Sydney). Some of these 'painterly' painters have been perceived as old-fashioned, and been excluded from histories of New Zealand art. Certainly, prior to the 1990s, a combination of modernist influence and nationalist belief in a forthright, unsophisticated New Zealand character led to the privileging of a flat, hard-edged style.

In 2002, both Badcock and Deans were included in an important touring exhibition called *Representation and Reaction*, shown initially at the Sarjeant Gallery in Whanganui. Curator Peter Shaw pitted paintings originally entered in the Kelliher Award (a populist competition for 'traditional' landscape paintings which ran from 1956 to 1977) against more modernist-oriented works. The result was a more balanced representation of New Zealand art history.

Representations make things, people and cultures visible, or reaffirm their presence. Whether as an individual, cultural group or community, to be represented is to be seen, acknowledged, included, given a voice. Representations can equally be damaging, perpetuating biases and stereotypes; power lies with those who make or control the representation

of others. Graham Fletcher's paintings show how indigenous artefacts are aestheticised and commodified. Star Gossage represents belonging to place, iwi and whenua (land), not only in her subject matter but also through her materials—pigments sourced directly from her ancestral land.

**BILL HAMMOND** (1947–2021) came to prominence during the late 1990s, though he had developed a cult following during the previous decade. His paintings of the 1980s conveyed states of anxiety, disturbance and hyper-activity, with manic figures caught up in a reeling and rocking world of plunging perspectives and raucous colours. The paint was applied so as to enhance the impression of a world in which refinement, finesse and subtlety were absent. Hammond often used music-related subjects or titles, and his paintings have variously been compared to punk, funk, rock and metal.

In 1989 Hammond visited the Auckland Islands where he was captivated by the penguins and the soaring albatross. Although he had frequently included birds or bird heads in his paintings before this trip, afterwards his paintings seemed to become part of a larger narrative about New Zealand birds and their fate in the hands of nineteenth century European scientists and settlers. Specifically, the paintings refer to the ornithologist Walter Buller, who catalogued and wrote about New Zealand birds, publishing his research with colour lithographs by John Gerrard Keulemans. Echoes of some of these illustrations can be found in many of Hammond's paintings.

Hammond continued to produce moody and ominous paintings with his characteristic half-bird, half-human figures, though paintings from 2001, such as *Boulder Bay II* (plate 173), have a lighter and more lyrical feeling. The first major public gallery exhibition of his work was *23 Big Pictures* in 1999, and several of his paintings were included in the inaugural Auckland Triennial at the Auckland Art Gallery in 2001. In 2007 the Christchurch Art Gallery organised a large touring survey exhibition.

Hammond was born in Christchurch. He studied at the University of Canterbury's School of Fine Arts from 1966–69, though he only began to focus on painting full-time in 1981. He lived in Lyttelton, and maintained a sense of detachment from the mechanisms of the artworld while nonetheless enjoying phenomenal success both critically and in the market.

**S RAPHINE PICK** (b. 1964) is known more for the unsettling mood of her figurative pictures than for particular formal or technical innovations. She paints scenes that suggest anxiety, vulnerability and unease. They have the appearance of being based on images and ideas dredged up from the unconscious or from fragments of memory. Some of the first paintings for which she gained attention featured faint outlines of, most memorably, beds and balloons, and a textured all-over surface in shades of white and cream. The paintings have been interpreted in relation to events in the artist's own childhood and life. However, they are not

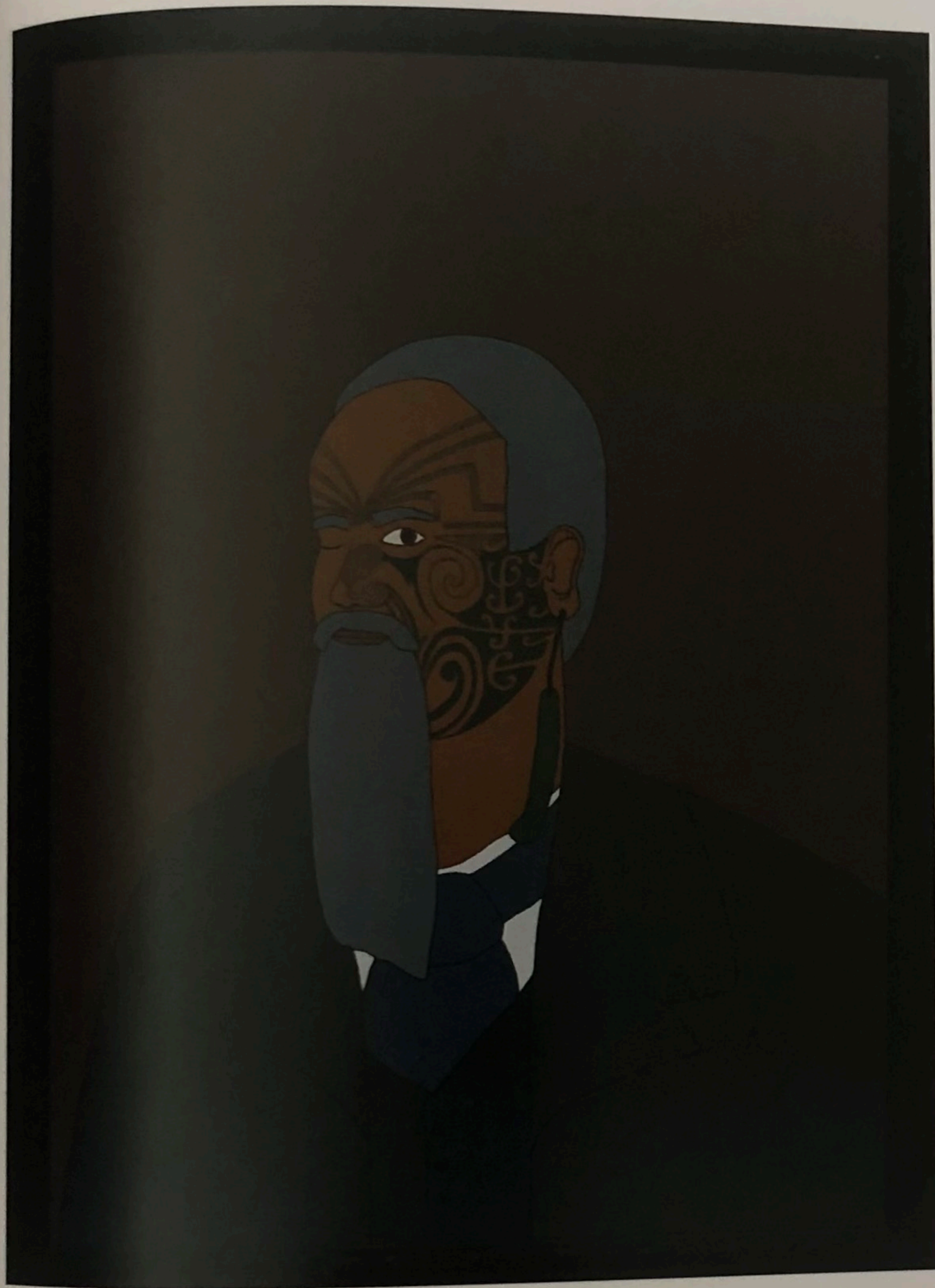


PLATE 178 | AYESHA GREEN (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāi Tahu), Tama-Ki-Hikurangi Renata Kawepo, 2016,  
acrylic on board, diptych, each piece 1210 x 1610 mm. Stevenson Collection

Art Award at Waikato Museum with her painting *Nana's Birthday*, and had a solo exhibition, *Wrapped Up in Clouds*, at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 2020.

**KUSHANA BUSH** (b. 1983) is a Dunedin artist known for finely executed figurative compositions in gouache on paper, often small-scale but full of detail. These pictures are not about New Zealand, or indeed about any one cultural tradition. They have affinities with Mughal, Turkish and Persian miniatures, Japanese Ukiyo-e and Shunga woodblock prints, ancient Korean Chaekorri painting, European medieval illuminated manuscripts and Early Renaissance fresco painting, with a hint of the English twentieth-century painter Stanley Spencer—yet there is no mistaking them, either, for anyone other than Kushana Bush. Their originality lies in the seamless synthesis of multiple styles and histories. Bush invents figures and settings that are curiously 'atemporal', untied to a particular period or moment. However, in this respect she is unquestionably contemporary, for today we have, all the time, almost instant online access to realities distant from us in time and space. The underlying point to Bush's work seems to be that however complex or sophisticated human systems and customs have become, and whether or not we believe in 'progress', human beings are much the same now as they were in Giotto's Italy or sixteenth-century Iran. They are ambitious and pathetic, covetous and tolerant, desperate and resilient, and many other things—including, perhaps, more animalistic than they like to think.

Bush depicts scenarios in which human life is frantic and perilous, like scenes of upheaval from elsewhere in the world that we watch from the comfort of the living room—'us lucky observers', as the title of a 2016 painting (plate 179) puts it. She specialises in the crowd, the heaving mass, piling figures up on top of each other, hands reaching, claspings and flailing expressively. Something is going on, but it takes some close peering to find out what it is. In keeping with the fact that the 'mainstream' of European painting (from the High Renaissance to the nineteenth-century) is virtually the only pictorial tradition she does not draw from, Bush eschews linear or single-point perspective.

In Bush's earlier pictures, figures tended to float in space, surrounded by white paper. More recently, architecture provides a framework for the figures. *Us Lucky Believers* also demonstrates a move to a larger scale, though the medium remains gouache and pencil on paper, and the extreme refinement of minuscule line-work prevails. Bush makes a series of careful preparatory studies for each painting, because the medium does not allow for corrections in the final work.

Bush graduated from the Dunedin School of Art in 2004. She was a recipient of the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship in 2011, and of a New Zealand Arts Foundation New Generation Award in 2013. A Dunedin Public Art Gallery survey exhibition covering the period 2014 to 2016, *The Burning Hours*, toured to Christchurch, Auckland and Whangārei, and her work is held in public collections across Australasia.

