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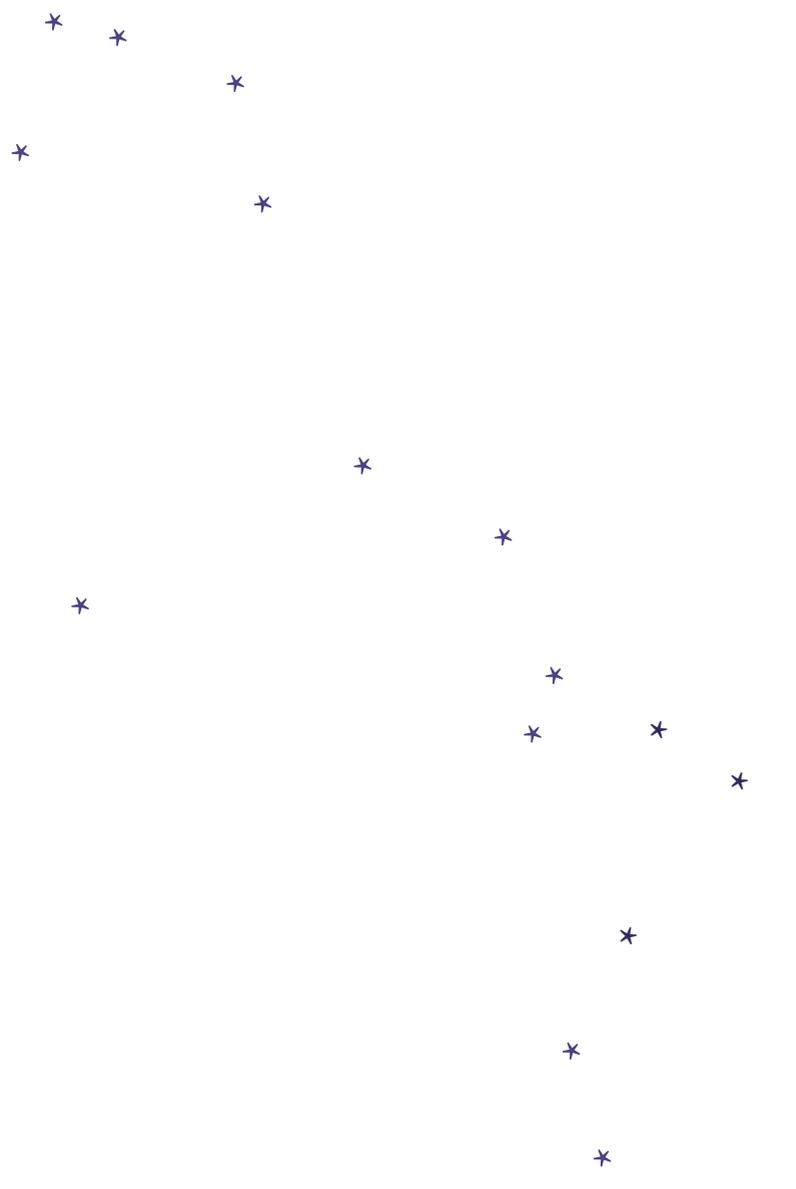
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IS IT THE
BEGINNING
OF A
NEW AGE?



Curated by Martin Patrick

Catherine Bagnall
Dhyana Beaumont
Georgette Brown
Daniel Kelly
Kane Laing
Tim Larkin
Adrian McClelland
Theo Macdonald
Louise Menzies
Rebecca Pilcher
Wes Wilson



Is it the Beginning of a New Age?
Text by Martin Patrick

I was born smack in the middle of the so-called Summer of Love, in July of 1967. Perhaps this fact has uncommon staying power in that I am obsessed with this era in a variety of respects, an era that “I missed,” coming of age in a period more characterised by Ronald Reagan, post-punk, heavy metal hair bands, and the King of Pop. I haven’t the ‘you should have been there’ attitude of some of the baby boomers of my acquaintance but rather a keen curiosity and temporally displaced fascination. In an evocative description of his experience as being a bit late for full-blown Sixties action, the late artist Mike Kelley (who was 13 years my senior) wrote: “I was mediated, I was part of the TV generation, I was Pop. I didn’t feel part of my family, I didn’t feel part of my country; I had no sense of history: the world seemed to me a media façade, a fiction, and a pack of lies. This, I believe, is what has come to be known as the postmodern condition.”¹

The sort of ironic (and utterly terrifying) distance of which the artist speaks is quite similar to my own juvenile trajectory, grasping onto proto-mashup life-rafts of popular culture of different eras, genres, and literature that spoke to a fragmented and bemused sensibility, literary figures early on such as Kurt Vonnegut, and later David Foster Wallace, Thomas Pynchon, and Don DeLillo. Postmodernism has/

1. Mike Kelley, “Cross Gender/Cross Genre” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 22: 1 (January 2000) 1-9.

* had its definite limits however, such as in the manner that if everything potentially “means nothing” and becomes truly image, pastiche, spectacle we can become detached from firsthand experience and the cues that make lived experience that much more significant. Let alone the fact that seemingly immaterial, creative and spiritual energies of considerable importance can seem completely overridden by the energies of electronic signals and transmissions; the constant white noise and glare of the accelerated present.

* The current exhibition for the Engine Room *Is it the Beginning of a New Age?* incorporates the work of eleven artists bringing a range of aesthetics, backgrounds, and experiences. All of the artists in one way or another respond to countercultures, spiritual or ethical realities, fantastic worlds, utopian possibilities, and potential alternatives to any perceived norm. Of course this to a degree becomes relatively unified within the speculative, but often deceptively clear and distinct coordinates of current artistic practice. Paradoxically most of the works in the exhibition are devoted to the object and image, and manifestly concrete, yet speak towards that which is less evident, hard to quantify, hybridised, and that which becomes fuel for contesting beliefs and narratives. My hope is to make an exhibition context which is simultaneously archeological/historical, and immediate/contemporary.

This exhibition is prompted by multiple factors, not the least of which artists that I’ve met over the past few years who engage with themes and histories relating to what is now often broadly termed “mind, body, spirit” themes but once might have been called other things on a spectrum from utopian sympathetic neologisms to drastically sceptical epithets. Among them of course would be the phrase “new age.” I have always had very ambivalent relations to this notion. Of course one could flippantly say *how new, or when* did this start, or in comparison to *what* exactly?

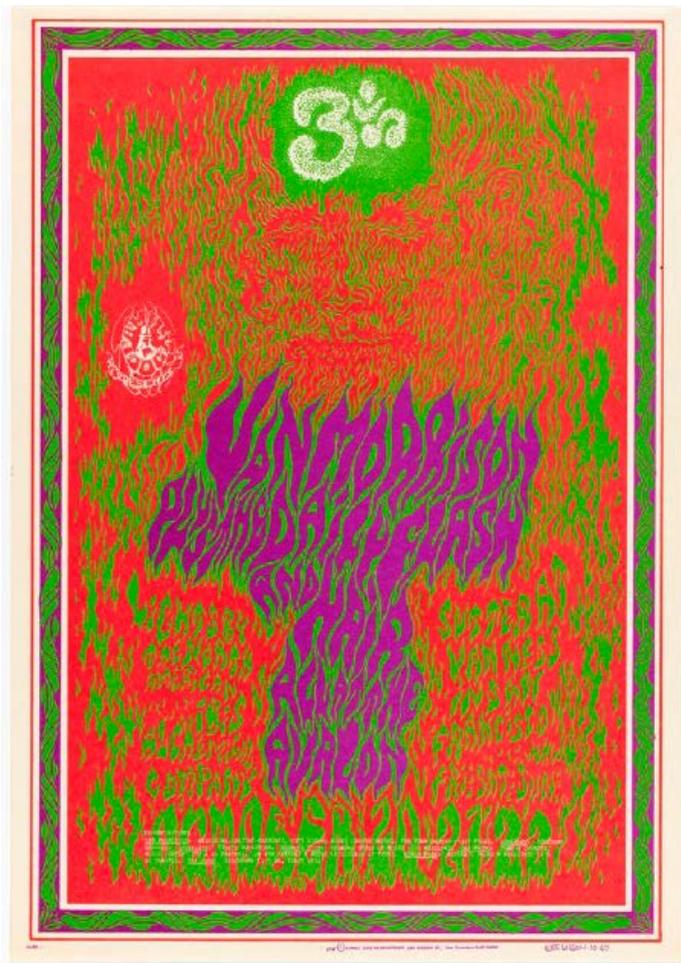
And I can’t help having a late period melodic but typically dark Velvet Underground song run through my mind, its chorus being: “It’s the beginning of a new age/

It’s a new age” and that was 1969, an era in which I myself was a toddler and the Vietnam war (or depending on your global vantage point, The American War) was raging away, therapies such as primal scream were fads, and multiple developments of the 1960s were not exactly coming to fruition as planned. So of course, why wouldn’t young hippies, and other countercultural folk turn to what might be viewed as “older ways,” and perceived alternatives. Moreover, idealism and hope endure rough periods, and most significantly such notions might enable us to get “beyond ourselves” via a wide range of cultural practices and belief systems, even/especially if mutated, reconfigured, and remixed in an art context. The musician Lou Reed once commented that: “it’s important not to feel alone,” thus the consequential role of music.

I have included Wes Wilson’s poster for a Van Morrison gig in 1967 as a kind of totemic touchstone for a mode of graphic advertisement, which although admittedly dated in some respects, is adamantly resilient in others; maybe like Syd Barrett recordings or some other timepiece, once so exactly accurate, now so admirably “offkilter” in the best sort of way. Wilson was a member of the formidable collective of San Francisco graphic artists known as The Family Dog. Over the course of just a few years, they created a vast array of posters for bands from the Velvet Underground to the 13th Floor Elevators. The use of anachronistic Art Nouveau references along with day-glo brain numbing complementary colours and imagery drawn from Eastern mysticism and US subcultural waves, staked a flag for the new genre that became known as Psychedelic. Such art has been prized for years especially by those obsessed with the “products” advertised: rock and roll, counterculture, and social events, but this has only more recently translated into more scholarly and curatorial engagement with the force and power of such innovative cultural production.²

The era in which Wilson worked actively on such innovative designs has been in turn an influence on much younger artists like Theo Macdonald who in his recent comics and zines pays tribute to figures such as Lou Reed and David Bowie, describing in a moving but

2. See; *Summer of Love: Psychedelic Art, Social Crisis, and Counterculture in the 1960s*, Christoph Grunenberg & Jonathan Harris, eds. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005) And; *West of Center: Art and the Countercultural Experiment in America, 1965-1977*, Elissa Auther and Adam Lerner, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012) as particularly relevant examples.



Wes Wilson, *Van Morrison, Daily Flash; Avalon Ballroom October 20-22, 1967 (1967)*

disarmingly unsentimental way, largely owing to his sense of humour, the impact of pop cultural fandom, specifically the intensive and rather intimate involvement one might have with the creative production of artists one will never know. Our trainspotting attentiveness becoming ultimately deeply (and perhaps unexpectedly) affecting. With the loss of both these musicians, and even more recently Prince, these discussions have telling importance in the broadest sense. Macdonald's *An Original New-Waver* knowingly refers to Reed's lyrics ("The Original Wrapper"), Pop Art (Andy Warhol), as well as comics history (Archie aesthetic). In his thoughtful consideration of Reed, Macdonald ruminates upon the importance of the musician's frailty and vulnerability, although this was often in the public eye overshadowed by some tactical rudeness and bad behaviour. I can associate with this quite deeply as I spent much of my (extended) youth valorising to a degree the "cool shell" of artists like Reed, in order to secretly appreciate the vulnerable side much more, and in the end, with art that's what we have left.

A reading area in the exhibition features publications by a number of the artists (such as Macdonald) and a selection of texts that might harbour affinities with topics touched upon here. Those include books by Ram Dass, Alison Knowles, Alan Watts, John Cage, Marshall McLuhan, and others. Of particular note in respect to this area is artist Tim Larkin's custom designed and handmade furniture to both assist in the viewing of the materials, and assert a highly significant presence of their own. Larkin is an accomplished Wellington-based craft furniture maker and a Technical Demonstrator in Massey's School of Art. Larkin has exhibited his works widely, and in reference to an example from his earlier *Folk Furniture* series (2007-09), Bev Eng of the Dowse Museum commented: "it reminds me of a dwelling in the clouds perched on knobbly kneed sticks, or like a strange creature that could walk off on those quivery legs at any moment. I like artwork that comes alive."³ Larkin has often mixed a playful sense of innovation with a keen appreciation of (non-)traditional materials and diligent craft.

3. "Collection: Our Favourites" http://dowse.org.nz/about/collection/Larkin_Folk_Furniture/; consulted 10 July 2016.

Catherine Bagnall's artworks operate in multiple vicinities simultaneously, as childlike reveries and staunch critical appraisals of the problematics of the here and now. In a major installation in the show, Bagnall installs an array of "muffs", sewed, appliqued, and hand worked mixtures of fabric and possum fur. Possums being the scorned pests of Aotearoa New Zealand but also prized for their warmth and in this case their pelts incorporated into the artwork refer to numerous things at once, among them eroticism, eradication, and colonisation, and how all these impact on histories of dress and comportment. In the current exhibition it veers a bit towards in one respect the so-called New Zealand Gothic, and in another to a more meditative turn towards what Kate Soper terms "alternative hedonism," or a move towards a more ecological simplicity. And beyond a major sculptural installation, a fanciful painting on paper by Bagnall is here as well, as she makes interpretative dreamscapes that pay aesthetic homage to such visionaries as Tove Janssen, while deriving from her own performative walks in the bush landscape across Aotearoa New Zealand.

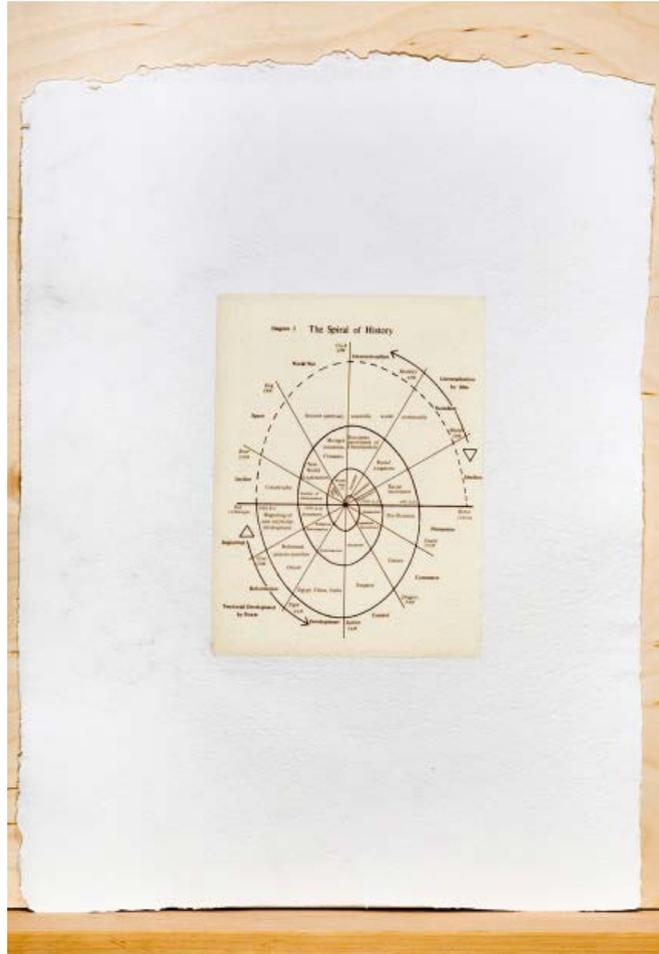
Over the past several years Rebecca Pilcher has been exploring the manifold implications of the Town Belt, surrounding Wellington as both a highly constructed, controlled, and manipulated area, and a pastoral, green, and meditative space ripe for creative and discursive play. In the current installation, Pilcher has reconfigured some portions of a timber geodesic dome that she exhibited in two radically different settings in 2015, once in a public park and once in a gallery space. In the Engine Room, the dome is deconstructed, splayed apart and becomes simultaneously a fractal-like relief and a viewing station, an area in which Pilcher's videos which appear to have a dreamlike, eccentric quality of their own are, in effect, transmitted through yet another mediating structure, accenting the embodied quality of our positioning as spectators. This provides an intriguing counterpoint to the almost ethereal quality of the footage, figures walking in a reverie, costumed with numerous colourful accessories, offering up an imaginative amalgam recalling both the experimental cinema of Maya Deren and Sci-Fi otherworldliness. By interrupting such footage with

inter-titles drawn from mindfulness texts, and adding a soundtrack of ambient music, Pilcher gives us a generous glimpse into a conjured space that's ultimately just as imaginary, constructed, and seemingly elusive as the town belt itself.

Archival publications redolent of radically different geographic settings and cultural worldviews became rich source material for a series of recent works on handmade paper by Louise Menzies. In *Diagram 2*, Menzies selected a schematic map, in style resembling more a teleological, linear representation, although opening from itself into whorls of anachronistic data, symbols, dogma, and jargon. As Jon Bywater notes: "Set within a new, broad, blank margin, though, the hubris of their particular 'universalisation' of history is laid bare. A period, Western countercultural cliché, the appropriation of Shēngxiào, the 'Chinese Zodiac', for example, only accentuates the overreach of its Eurocentric big idea (in which the term 'racial' also, in particular, jars today). The work abstracts the document from its source in this way, but at the same time re-presents it in all its physical specificity. The facsimile of the single page is not mounted onto but embedded into a new sheet—like a tile intogROUT, or a shell, anaerobically encased in sediment before permineralization into the fossil record."⁴ Menzies' work summons both a rather confusing temporal disjunction and displacement, and a riveting attention to the detailed, explanatory material of the source due to its careful (re-) presentation.

Dhyana Beaumont's paintings offer a plethora of coordinates from which to choose when reading the works, systems both aesthetically and spiritually derived, creating a woven pictorial structure that is as vivid as it is spatially dense and often ambiguous. Diagrammatic formal elements draw upon DNA helix spirals, sacred geometry and the Judaic tree of life. The paintings are spawned from a highly personal methodology, in which Beaumont paints and overpaints over long stretches of time, and uses spray paints, paint sticks, and collaged materials, investing the surfaces with a formidable layered intensity. As high key fluoro moments intersect with the iridescent shine of metallic

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4. Jon Bywater, "The Spiral of History," from an upcoming publication.
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paints, the works are incorporative of multiple art and life references, an abundant hybridised mix.

In his works *The Elder Dragon Wand*, *Wu-Dang Water-sword* and *Feather Sword pendant*, Daniel Kelly creates sculptural works from carved, painted, and otherwise skilfully altered found materials. As Kelly states: "In an age where Fantasy and Magic are thriving in movies and gaming, I am providing here a Taoist fuelled endeavour, of a reality more seemingly 'true to self' through the journey of the collection of materials." In his recent works Kelly has referenced an assortment of keen interests ranging from the Tao and I Ching, to tarot and martial arts, to the Wu-Tang Clan and Star Wars films. The considerable impact of Kelly's practice arrives in part from on one hand attention paid toward the integrity of materials, and on the other a whimsical sensibility more in line with contemporary remix culture than the traditional belief systems with which he is fascinated. That said, Kelly is a passionate believer in the magical, energetic powers that can be elicited by art objects and events, and this is often communicated through his sculptures, installations, paintings, and videos.

In the artworks of Georgette Brown a colourful amalgam of symbols and representations coexist almost as if floating freely without being tethered too closely to earthly rules of gravity. Brown's aesthetic although often stylistically consistent has been mutable in term of media and context, as she has designed posters and band costuming (*Orchestra of Spheres*, *Womb*), zines and publications, along with paintings, sculptures, and drawings. Brown's works have a childlike quality that while eclectic and idiosyncratic is infectious and engaging, with its clear and forthright generosity for the viewer. Sometimes this is seen through the abundance of colour, materials, and intensity, at other points via evident humour and her sensitivity towards the fantastical, utopian, and open-ended. Brown's works harbour unusual juxtapositions, intersections and encounters. Dragons, insects, tendrils, skeletons, snails, goddesses, totems, altars, sunflowers co-exist in a disarming micro-universe.

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* Kane Laing is a performance and video artist along with a range of other pursuits including a serious dedication to meditation and researching the contexts surrounding it. Moreover, Lang comments that: "in practice I am more interested in how to create an opportunity for an audience to engage with meditation in a way that goes beyond ideas and conceptual thinking." Laing considers video a helpful medium especially due to its accessibility for the viewer. His work *Meditation* is a looped video featuring portraits of people in the act of meditating. According to Laing: "the work attempts to explore the boundaries and qualities of video in relation to photography, as well as what can be captured and stored in a video's frames and what is then passed on to the viewer." That seems to be one of the most interesting aspects to my mind, is the inability to know exactly what's going on in another person's head/body/consciousness, so what is it that we can determine when regarding others engaging in an act of stillness, presentness, and peace? Perhaps like a video signal such energies might leak through, emerging from the mediated context and play a significant role for the spectator as well.

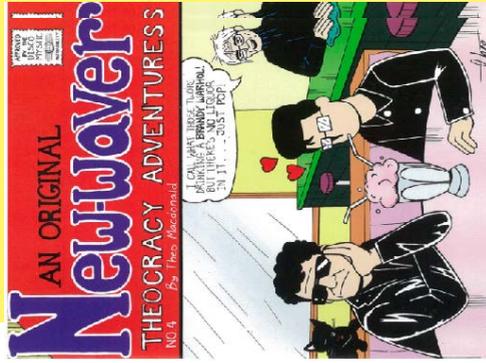
* Adrian McClelland's intention is to enact a rite of cleansing the sealed front area of the Engine Room via the release of coloured flares. According to the artist: "This project undertakes to investigate a combination of ideas that run up against each other in the gallery space. How an artwork emerges as a by-product/recording of a non-performative piece—a referencing around Noa and Waharoa siting an attunement and recognition of the space and utilisation, not just the function – The usage of a building as it pertains to Lebbeus Woods and 'healthy' architecture – troupes found around 'New Age.' I mention troupes as there is no holistic winner, for a majority. New Age practices sit in a somewhat grey area of brilliantly viable and tragically mystical - there is contention." As McClelland states, this "grey area" is the territory of the current exhibition, although many of the artworks physically * operate through a wide range of differing tonalities, kaleidoscopic colours, and intensities of experience. To eff the ineffable, so to speak, might require multiple strategies. By ridding the space of Tapu prior to the entrance of the artworks and viewers, McClelland responds simultaneously *

to indigenous Maori cultural protocol and conceptual lineages in contemporary art of that which seen/unseen, material/immaterial, present/absent.

Is it the Beginning of a New Age? involves an attempt to round up some very contemporary artists, at differing points in their art/life trajectories who could be seen to have something helpful to say about the complications of mind/body/spirit in the 21st Century. In many respects this show is a very subjective and personal one for me as in it many of my worlds collide, both in terms of working with a number of artists I know well in one way or another and certain of my extra-artistic interests in alternative healing, subcultural histories, mysticism and esoteric belief systems. At the same time I am always holding many of these interests at a distance, perhaps keeping them arms length as to not complete become embraced by the force of their energy, lest it thwart my hard earned (and often hard headed) intellectualism. That is, a real fear emerges that somehow the "research" becomes so entangled with intimate, intuitive processes of outlook that will perhaps make everything all too personal, idiosyncratic and, worst case, unhelpful, uninteresting, or untranslatable to others. *

But luckily that's where the art comes in. I imagine that many of the generative, embedded, and manifold contradictions of contemporary art production might end up undercutting all this textual back and forth with their aesthetic, conceptual, and affective presence. And my hope for this exhibition is that its abundance of intriguing content will ultimately make my indecision and fretting largely beside the point. And if I turn to the works and artists on view it will offer an avenue to not necessarily resolve any questions raised but to establish a vibrant and important viewing, meditative, reading, and participatory platform for further discussion and reflection. *

SOME ARTWORKS



11. Theo Macdonald, *Original New-waver* (2015).



10. Tim Larkin, *Shakey Cage & Motion air sketch* (2008). [previous Work]



4. Catherine Bagnall, *The Misty's in their animal suits* (2016).



3. Rebecca Pilcher *Dome 2* (2016) from *Soft Realities* series.



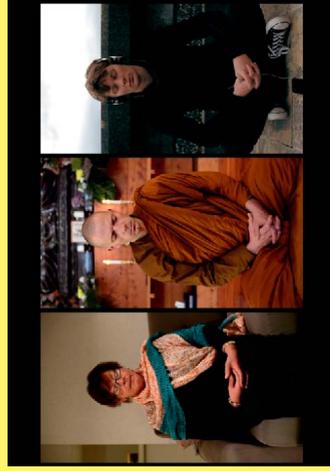
7. Dhyana Beaumont, *Unified Heart Consciousness: Flower of Life* (2016).



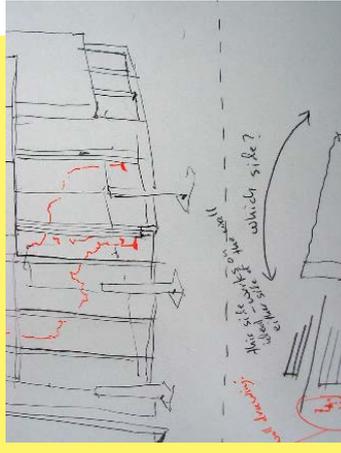
6. Daniel Kelly, *The Elder Dragon Wand, Wu-Dang Water-sword & Feather Sword pendant* (2016).



8. Georgette Brown, detail of *They Who Heal Themselves* (2016).



5. Kane Laing, *Meditation* (2015).



1. Adrian McClelland, *On any given day ka pū te ruha, ka hao te rangatahi* (2016).

MAP OF WORK

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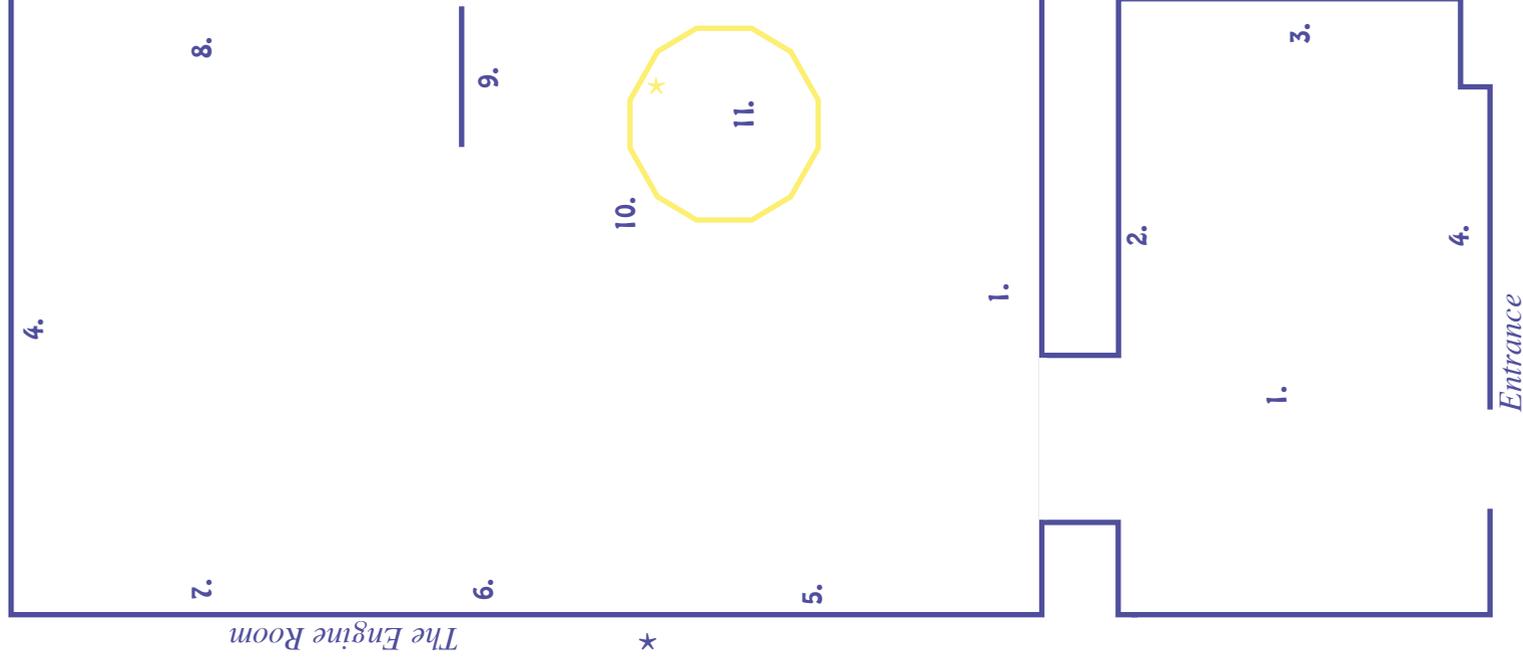
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The Engine Room

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1. Adrian McClelland

2. Louise Menzies

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3. Rebecca Pilcher

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4. Catherine Bagnall

5. Kane Laing

6. Daniel Kelly

7. Dhyana Beaumont

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8. Georgette Brown

9. Wes Wilson

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10. Tim Larkin

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11. Theo Macdonald

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Entrance

THANKS

I would like to thank all the artists, it's been a wonderful experience discussing this project with you! Many thanks also to all at the Engine Room especially Shannon Te Ao for co-steering this project at times and Josephine Jelichich for her gracious assistance on many logistical matters and superb catalogue design. It's always great to have Bryce Galloway on as resident cult muso (and sometime senior lecturer). And of course the School of Art's technical staff: Daniel Boobyer, Mike Heynes, Tim Larkin, Shaun Waugh, and Jane Wilcox. Thanks are in order to Massey University facilities management and health and safety staff for extending patience towards the rather unorthodox paths taken by artists in the process of making site responsive artworks. I would also like to offer special thanks to those whose input on issues relating to energetic healing and holistic notions of the world we inhabit were invaluable in shaping this project, including Carole Bonhomme, Selena Hsu, Alicia Melrose, and Dharshan Naryan.

—Martin Patrick

Is it the Beginning of a New Age?

19/07/16–05/08/16

_The Engine Room

Curated by Martin Patrick

Text by Martin Patrick

Design by Josephine Jelichich

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Wellington, 2016

**_THE
ENGINE
ROOM**

 **MASSEY UNIVERSITY**
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND