



Josephine Cachemaille

10 June - 6 August 2017

THE SUTER ART GALLERY 208 Bridge St
TE ARATOI O WHAKATŪ Nelson
thesuter.org.nz

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This text is part of a series of recent conversations between Josephine Cachemaille and Jaimee Stockman-Young, discussing art, therapy, objects, feminism and feelings. Jaimee Stockman-Young is an artist, recent graduate from Elam's MFA program, and gallery administrator at Art Space Auckland, NZ.

Continuing Conversations

JC Josephine Cachemaille - For this show *Us, Us, Us* I'm working with the permanent collection at The Suter, Nelson's public gallery.

Before I got into the storeroom I imagined that the paintings, sculptures and objects might be a family, rife with rifts, loyalties, feuds, loves, and tolerances, held hostage in a building. Fancifully, I thought that maybe I would be a kind of therapist helping them express their inner lives. But when I got in there I realised the whole environment was nurturing and caring. They were encased in padded boxes. Soft gloves and cushions are used to handle, transport and examine them. I assumed they would feel trapped, desperate, disconnected, but mostly they felt quiet and ready. It was weirdly moving.

Also, the artworks were in no way alone. Inevitably they were within a complex network of relationships. The storeroom, the electricity powering the lights that allowed me to perceive them; the firm chip foam chocks that get to touch the paintings more than human hands ever will; the hazard markings on the floor; the strapping systems to hold them in place in case of earthquakes, the air-con humming, the dust, the DNA.

That storeroom insists on a kind of heightened sensitivity. It encourages slow movements, no loose-fitting clothing, don't step backwards without looking first, careful precise methods for locating, lifting, unpacking, holding, recording.

So, I don't know if I have ended up as a therapist, maybe instead a channeller? I don't really know what I am. It is not a curatorial engagement. I'm not approaching them as art historical artifacts or sociocultural story-tellers, trend or taste relics, or as triggers or reservoirs for narratives, or as particular examples of painting techniques or glaze technologies, or as clusters of pigments, canvas, dust, DNA. They are all of these things and many more.

The works I am assembling are evolving into installations taking in diverse actors: the chip-foam chocks; my paintings; the trolleys that transport the work around the gallery; paintings from the collection; the white gloves that moderate the handling experience between staff and the objects; the carpet; ceramic pots, bowls and sculptures and the crates that house them; the lighting that allows us to perceive the collection visually; the electricity running throughout the building; tools from the studio; fabric remnants from making and stuffing soft sculptures; clothing and footwear I have worn while I researched and made the show etc etc etc.

It's a kind of flattened ontology. Everything can be in the mix and the mission/project is to draw attention to this.

JSY Jaimee Stockman-Young - It's funny, I have been thinking a lot recently about humanizing the institution, creating something indeed nurturing, procreative, energizing. And here you are bringing not just the institution to life but acting as a conduit to an expression or energy for the objects that make up the built/structural/exhibitive environment of it.

I feel like your assumption was not misguided. It is reasonable for one to find the formalities of public art institutions claustrophobic. There is a perception that many of these places are stuffy and unwelcoming, with arbitrary rules and unknown expectations of behaviour. So it is exciting to me to hear of this secret life of the collection, to hear of you acting as a divining rod to an unseen world, exposing a web of finely woven connectivity.

We have talked before about the idea of you giving agency to the object but this feels more like liberating the audience of their perceptions. This makes me think a lot of the idea of *Object Permanence/Constancy* within psychology. It is something I talk to my therapist about a lot, because it is something I lack. The understanding that when people are not directly being engaged with by yourself that they are gone. Out of sight, out of mind, or more like out of sight, abandoned, broken, unwanted.

It gives me a really warm feeling to consider that out of sight can also mean existing within another context, an unseen living, especially when it comes to the non-sentient end of the spectrum of things we engage with in our daily lives.

JC I find this thinking really comforting too. Usually when I think about the complexity of the world, and there being millions of multiple things happening all of the time, I feel really spooked. I find life pretty intense when it is simple. I want to miss out. It would have been a different story when I was younger - (15-30 yrs). I used to do everything at maximum capacity - almost used the intensity to not leave room for thinking/feeling. But, now thinking of other things existing in self-involved ways, unconcerned with us and all of our shit, does comfort me too.

That's really interesting about *Object Permanence*. Maybe it should be called *Person Permanence* - perhaps objects are more reliable - less likely to fuck-off on us...

JSY It should be called *Person Permanence*, you are right. Objects are definitely more reliable. Something about the lack of legs, and the lack of a desire to hurt one another because of their own pain.

I find the complexities of the world very overwhelming too. Like too much to deal with, too many moving parts. Everything is always shifting and changing outside your grasp. It's hard to feel like you have any control. Maybe that is why, and I hope this is an ok proposition to you, but maybe that is why you hide in objects, and I hide in archives or writing.

Maybe you aren't the Therapist, or the Channeler, or the Animator (outside of an obvious practical sense). Maybe the objects are the therapy. Psychodrama art therapy for those that find the human world too much to handle sometimes. Sure you are the active party, but with my experience in therapy it is often the patient that directs the process far more than the therapist. If anything the therapist is a mirror for the patient to explore themselves.

The idea that a gallery can facilitate this kind of nurturing healing is what I feel like the unexplored area of art can be. Imagine if therapists did sessions amongst art. I think the process you have been able to perform has done that in a way. You have been set free to make the institution what you, and it, wants to be. A higher power for a higher meaning. Art therapy for anxious artists and anxious audiences.

JC I think you're right! It was only recently that I realised that art making was therapeutic for me. Before that I sort of waved art round like a unreliable weapon - pointing it at things, poking things with it, trying to establish some intellectual and conceptual power. Similar to our conversation from months ago about my attitudes when I was younger, I thought "art as therapy" was some kind of self-involved cop-out. Now I'm really curious about this. I'm an anxious person, many of us are. My art-making practice is a lonely endeavour, but it is populated by fraternal, friendly, emotional relationships with things. If art helps, do it.

JSY I am definitely guilty of the same artistic violence, waving around conceptual, surface level objects that I had no real connection to. Work that didn't impact me personally, that only proved some ability to camouflage myself in the plumery of the art world. Art that I could impose a particular dialogue on to, not work that spoke back to me.

I think that is the aspect of your work that I enjoy the most. That it feels like a conversation, not a riddle.

So much of the Art that is made now, and before, is an exercise in intellectual cruelty. It feels immensely unproductive to orient an industry/community around the idea of "I know something you don't know". This is all part of the performance I think. This violence often comes from a place of competition or exclusivity, but violence, I feel, is often just a tool to hide pain. I think maybe this kind of artistic violence comes from the pain caused by a fear of irrelevance, or redundancy. Anxiety induced by being asked to perform in the expected format of the art world, outside of one's own nature of being.

I loved the part of our last conversation where you talked about moving past skepticism, or cynicism, and allowed some critical humour, a leap of faith if you will, that these theories, that the inanimate is alive, that it speaks, that you can converse with it, and that it converses with other inanimate things. I am wary, however, of the idea of this being "New". While significantly appreciating the idea of moving away from anthropocentric hierarchies, this area of discussion always made me feel wary of it being a continuation of colonialism.

How can we consider this concept as part of "New Age" spiritualism when ideas like this existed within Kaupapa Maorī long before our ancestors stole this land and in many other indigenous cultures, or cultures outside of Western influence. That the trees and the birds, the air and the objects around us manifest spirit, and are as much a part of us as they are individual. That they protect us, and we protect them, that everything is always in conversation, an ever evolving and moving balance.

JC I think using the terms '*animism*' and '*animist*' raises anxieties, and this is important and useful. Because these are anthropological constructs, coined in the colonial encounter, they still have the capacity to make us fascinated and uncomfortable. As much as the terms were (and still are) used to describe the '*other*', the '*them*', they also describe the '*us*'. I am exploring the possibility that we are all animists, the idea that the world of objects and world of subjects are separate, has always been an illusion.

What you describe above is such a pleasing way to think of the world, but it is certainly not how I experience the world consistently or how I "believe" the world to be. I don't think I could ever be a 'real' animist because my ontological approach is characterised by modernist detachment and objectification. The project is not suggesting I/we can experience the world as Maorī, Japanese Shinto, indigenous Americans etc, or that we should look to these groups to emulate or appropriate their beliefs. I am more curious about what is already happening, what we already do, but do not acknowledge.

Us, ,Us, ,Us

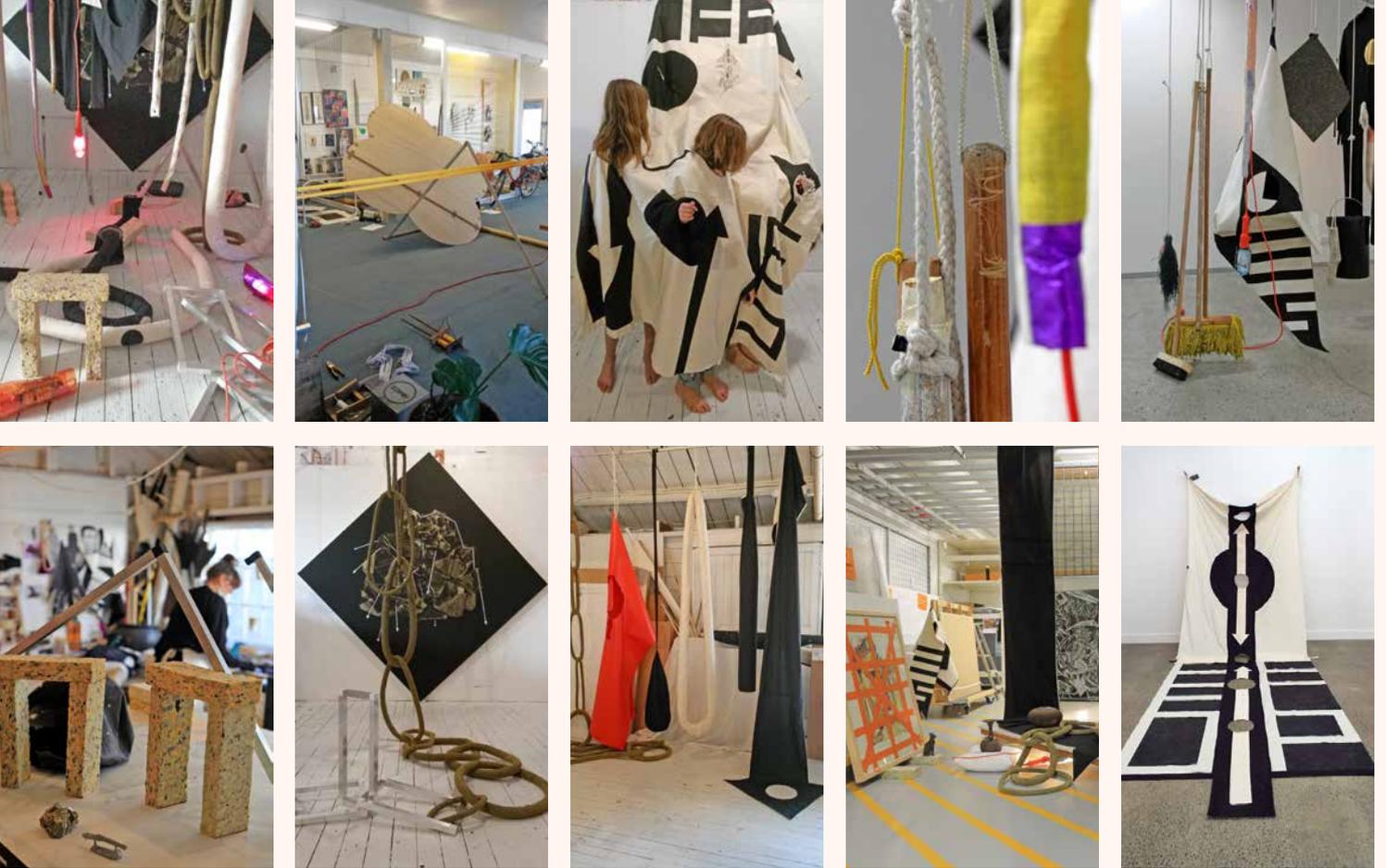
Suspended in time, an art gallery's collection exists in an echo chamber - carefully secured in an enclosed space that is only briefly breached to allow the escape of carefully chosen objects for public display. The rest of the time these artworks are nestled together on shelves and racks in private conversation. Interrupting and interpreting their 'private' lives is Josephine Cachemaille in her exhibition *Us, Us, Us*.

Delving into The Suter collection Cachemaille has spent months engaging with the eccentricities of the gallery. Through the process of exploring the clinical safety of the collection store, Cachemaille has forged relationships with and between a vast array of artworks as well as the systems, equipment and environment in which they live. The resulting exhibition animates these interactions within the gallery walls revealing that which is so often hidden.

Creating objects that sit alongside items from the collection Cachemaille's interventions are hard and soft, comforting and questioning, quasi-spiritual and unquestionably funny. Framing, caging, positioning and exposing forgotten or iconic artworks, she creates training and therapy-like aids that illuminate the collection in playful and spirited ways. Paintings are freed from the walls to lounge in three dimensions, ceramics hold court, while arrows and fingers point the way.

Contemporary art is predicated on the conceptual, the emphasis is placed on the concept of the work with the material used to express the idea being, if not inconsequential, of lesser importance. A reaction to the historical prominence placed on the craftsman or artisan, this mode of artmaking instead focuses on the intellectual and metaphysical role of the art and artist in society. *Us, Us, Us* reaches across this divide and re-examines the role of the material as equally physical and philosophical.

Cachemaille rejects the binary ways in which art, and the world, are often understood. On the surface her work contrasts high and low art, precious and insignificant materials, serious and lively methods of display, but these are not juxtapositions but integrations. Aluminium tubing, paintings, sculptures, tools and fabric are unified throughout the gallery in ways that force the viewer to experience the artworks collectively. Rather than a presentation of discrete, conceptually singular artworks *Us, Us, Us* is instead a body. Through Cachemaille's work the space becomes a complex environment of interdependent objects that are configured as ritualistic assemblages in which each object is equivalent in its agency and worth. It would be easy to categorise Cachemaille's work as an exploration of the anthropomorphising of objects, but a more accurate characterisation of Cachemaille's practice is that she is investigating a kind of speculative realism where objects are no longer vessels or proxies for humanity, but everything is understood as being equally remarkable, be it a painting, a piece of fabric, a thought, or a person.



Above and next page:
Works in progress, 2017

The experiential infuses all aspects of this exhibition. The entrances to the space are cloaked, with viewers forced to negotiate their way through and within artworks to enter the gallery proper. Through the process of entering it becomes evident that 'viewer' is the wrong word, you have become a participant. Traditionally, visual arts exhibitions require interaction with our eyes. *Us, Us, Us* broadens its scope to acknowledge that life and art are not simply visual experiences, but require full body and multisensory involvement.

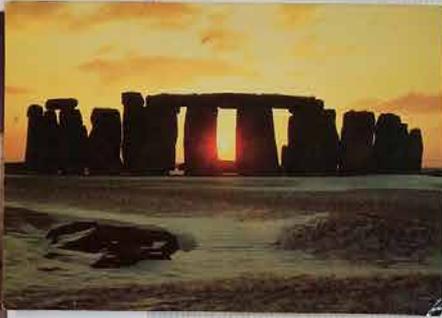
Cachemaille's work, with its flat ontology, refuses to privilege the conceptual over the material, the visual over the physical, or the human over the object. By entering the space you have become part of it. The artworks invite interaction by literally and figuratively directing participants through the space with arrows, fingers and openings. Rather than the viewer/participants activating the static space of exhibition with their presence, it is a partnership between equals.

Breaking down the barriers that literally and figuratively separate 'us' and 'them', *Us, Us, Us* is a rallying cry or hissed incantation, a chant that asks us to find new ways of experiencing objects that are loaded with energy, meaning, culture and history. Cachemaille inverts the traditional paradigms in which these items are displayed to legitimise the privileged hierarchies of art. Instead she creates a visual language which uncovers the multitude of collective and individualistic ways in which art collections can be understood as alive.

Sarah McClintock
Curator, The Suter Art Gallery Te Aratoi o Whakatū

Modern

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Clockwise from top:

Drawing Down Don. 2017

Brooms, hessian, key ring, acrylic on canvas, carpet, bullclip, bucket, driftwood, plastic gems, skin suit, fringing, lamp, coat hangers, aluminium, paint roller extension, cloth, cord and rope. Dimensions variable.

Connect Us. 2017

Acrylic on canvas and calico, aluminium, rope
2500mm x 2500mm x 120mm

Defender Redux. 2017

Acrylic and gouache on board
2600mm x 2600mm x 100mm



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