

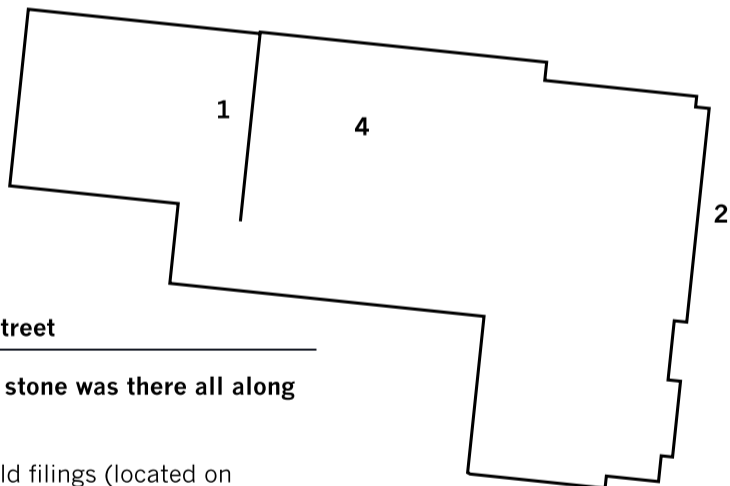
Deanna Dowling, Tomas Richards, Cobi Taylor, Robyn Jordaan

A Tragic Delusion

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Wednesday 5 – Saturday 29 August 2015

List of Works



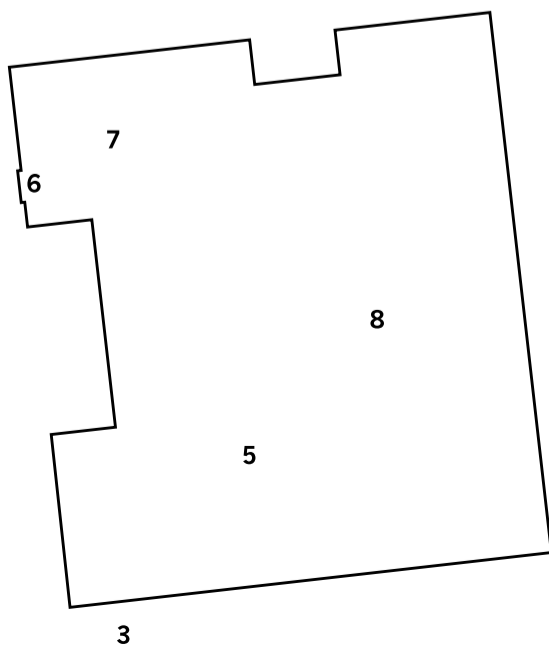
Blue Oyster 16 Dowling Street

1–3 In search of gold, the stone was there all along

Deanna Dowling
2015
Oamaru stone, fine gold filings (located on Dowling and Crawford Streets), video loop 5min.

4–5 Traversing Particles

Tomas Richards
2015
Located in Blue Oyster and Dutybound: miscellaneous found objects, particles, materials, elements and sounds carried and exchanged reciprocally between 16 Dowling Street and 57 Crawford Street, dimensions and durations variable. Assisted by Jake Fairweather.



Dutybound 57 Crawford Street

6 Definitely Unfinished 1

Cobi Taylor
2015
Cut glass, acrylic paint, Indian ink, paint shield.

7 Definitely Unfinished 2

Cobi Taylor
2015
Les mills vinyl billboard skin, acrylic paint, Indian ink, latex.

8 I never really played

Robyn Jordaan
2015
Hand-cut MDF, blue and yellow house paint, pinewood handles and screws.

A Tragic Delusion

Deanna Dowling, Tomas Richards, Cobi Taylor, Robyn Jordaan
Wednesday 5 – Saturday 29 August 2015

Observing the characteristics of a specific moment in time, 'A Tragic Delusion' brings together four emergent practitioners working in sculpture, installation and performance to explore artist-run exhibition ideals that existed outside of the gallery system in the 70s, 80s and 90s.

Using an empty loft space in Dunedin's designated 'warehouse precinct', an area that has hosted countless artistic activities in its prolonged derelict state, the exhibition symbolically juxtaposes past experiments with present ideals—decentralising the Blue Oyster and offering the space up to be absorbed into a broader less conventional exhibition of new work across several sites.

While the premise of 'A Tragic Delusion' is positioned in the past, the exhibition is situational; set up to test the nature of emerging sculptural practice in New Zealand today. This can be seen in the way Deanna Dowling's practice is framed by her commitment to sculpture, whereas Cobi Taylor's works can be read as installations that explore and reject conventional painting narratives, scale and histories. While Tomas Richards quietly and physically unearths material relationships between human-shaped objects and the inanimate, Robyn Jordaan's energetic practice blasts open common conceptions about sculpture and performance using ad hoc processes, presence and humour.

Accompanying Public Programme

Labour . Day

A Live Work by Adrian Hall
Saturday 8 August
9am – 5pm
Dutybound

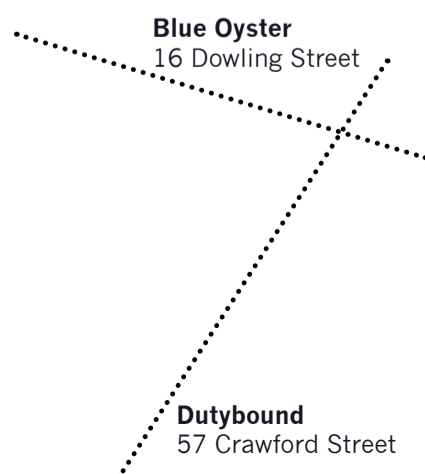
For one day only Adrian Hall is coming to work for the Blue Oyster. Put to work in the main Dutybound space, Hall will begin work at 9am sharp, with a lunch break sometime between 12pm and 1pm and knock off at 5pm.

The underground is dead, long live the underground

Screening of *Dereliction* 15min (1996) and conversation with Kim Pieters
Saturday 15 August
1pm – 2pm
Blue Oyster

Kim Pieters (1959) has lived and worked in Dunedin since 1993. She is an abstract painter. For many years she has also produced photographs, experimental film, writing and music, from her Dunedin studios. *Dereliction* documents a four-hour exhibition of drawings held one Sunday afternoon in Vogel House (where Wine Freedom now resides). Sound performances by Sandoz Lab Technicians, Donald McPherson and Flies Inside the Sun feature in this capture. Kim will then discuss the importance of the 'underground' with especial reference to Dunedin's longstanding (at least since the 1970/80's and probably way before) underground arts and music activity: how it has provided the intelligence and support for her own practice and how she has watched the continual reinvention of itself to this day.

Map



Characteristics of Change

Screening of *The Characteristics of C-Minor* (2014) and conversation with Nick Knox
Saturday 22 August
1pm – 2pm
Blue Oyster

Nick Knox is a composer, pianist, and singer. His sound is at once gruff, delicate, and soulful, laced with baroque sensibilities. He is almost totally self-taught, and his live keyboard compositions are completely improvised. The *Characteristics of C-Minor* documents Nick's evolution as a performer as well as Dunedin's gothic character. Nick (with his keyboard) will then discuss his practice with Dunedin-based musician and Blue Oyster gallery administrator Emilie Smith.

Monumental Mishaps

A conversation with Stuart Griffiths
Saturday 29 August
1pm – 2pm
Blue Oyster

Described in local media as a "monumental sculptor", Stuart Griffiths has been based in Dunedin since the early 1980s. Stuart will discuss recent encounters and issues related to sculpture in Dunedin. He will also talk to Dunedin's rich history of non-institutional and alternative spaces in the 1980s.

Thank you

Exhibition kindly supported by Lawrie at ZealSteel and David at Dutybound.



Blue Oyster art project space.

Part One

The 1970s. An ideal starting point for this exhibition would have been to build a time machine and step into the Artist's Co-op in 1978, the *F1 Sculpture Project* in 1981, or Bruce Barber's *Mount Eden Crater Performance* in 1973. However, I have had to settle on readings and conversations to explore how emerging sculpture in New Zealand has reached the moment it is in today.

Isolation. Productive isolation is something that Wistan Curnow, with the benefit of hindsight, deemed valuable to an artist's development early on in the antipodes: "Those New Zealand artists and intellectuals who started out in the 1920s and 1930s had the advantage of being faced with this isolation earlier and in starker form."¹ Curnow wrote this in 1973 and it is often cited as an essay that helped progress New Zealand's artistic standing from provincial to metropolitan, from post-war to post-object and into the bloated economy of the 1980s.

1980–1990s. New models for sculptural practice sought to blend the art world and life began to emerge in New Zealand with initiatives such as the Australian and New Zealand Artist Encounter (ANZART) and the South Island Art Projects (SIAP). Speaking to SIAP in the 1990s, ANZART founder Ian Hunter explained how *F1* achieved this union: "In this space the artist is immersed in a community to such an extent that he/she ceases to be the 'art expert' but rather one anonymous particle among many."²

Unconventional Sites. "Pauline Rhodes worked across an enormous area on the ground floor in such a way that the viewer could walk through the installation (*Extensums: ground runs – stained ground*) and discover tiny details on the floor surface to which attention had been directed by chalk and water marks, by hose tubing and by the metal covers pulled open from small gutters which previously I hadn't noticed. Rhodes spent several days installing large undulating lengths of paper which had been stained by rusting steel sheets, and curved grids placed upright at regular intervals across the floor."³

1990–2000s. The spaces we feel we know inside and out today were once much different: the Blue Oyster was an artist-run space in 1999. It was inspired by the independence and confidence of Teststrip, Fiat Lux, Room 3 (Auckland), Red Metro and Honeymoon Suite (Dunedin). As Y2K threatened the world's end, inspiration eventually gave way to aspiration for many spaces. SIAP gave up on its spaceless, rhizomatic composition and transformed into The Physics Room as government funding opened up legitimate non-commercial possibilities for artist-run spaces.

Isolation (again). "The ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is 'art'. The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself".⁴ White space crept into artist-run spaces very quietly and arguably very naturally. Famed for its resistance and survival, the High Street Project in Christchurch was a white cube in 2005, as was the final iteration of Teststrip. I found myself staring at one I inadvertently created in 2012. I excused this as necessary because the walls were initially a grimy beige-pink, yet I wonder what our space would have fostered if we had have left them be.

2000–2015. In 2013, after a month-long exhibition of video work that required three skylights to be blacked out, a sculpture exhibition followed in the programme. Being an artist-run space, there was little time in between exhibitions to make the elaborate climb back onto the roof to tear down the polythene that darkened the space. It was decided that the gallery lights would work well as they would be brighter than natural light anyway. Mid-way into the exhibition, a visitor passed through the space and a conversation about sculpture was had. Unaware that we had skylights, the visitor recalled the how much better natural light is over sculpture. The visitor was none other than Pauline Rhodes. I removed the polythene that afternoon and reshot the exhibition documentation.

A Tragic Delusion. In the time it has taken to write this text, time machines remain unavailable, white spaces are still the norm, and isolation anxiety still

plagues the New Zealand art community even in today's globalised world. Rifling through fifty years of emerging contemporary practice has helped me try and understand this as well as come to terms with my own tragic delusion as a curator working within and supporting an aspirational, white cube project space. By offering this premise and an additional non-gallery space to four young artists with critical, experimental practices I hope to unearth, pick apart and situate what emergent sculpture, installation and performance is today.

Part Two

The problem with making work is that once you start you generally have to finish it, give it a title and talk about it. Somehow, Cobi Taylor manages to elude most of these formalities, entirely preoccupied with making the work. Her process combines every aspect of construction: stopping, starting, temporarily abandoning sections, and cutting up other sections. She walks all over the works, stitching, gluing, skinning, picking and scraping until the surface is unrecognisable and completely her own. Taylor refers to this method as 'Frankensteining', intentionally working against modernist painting tropes. The result of this process is an intense, flattened constellation of paint and ink with hints of architecture—an exercise in abstraction and a determined rejection of narrative.

In this exhibition she presents two works that continue this process, one large painting installed from the rafters of the space and a painted work on glass installed in a bricked over window frame. The latter is a subtle but significant departure from her works on paper, canvas and vinyl—materials that can be ground down through her obfuscated process. Both works fall under the title *Definitively Unfinished*—borrowed from Duchamp's description of his glass work *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915-1923). Both paintings reveal Taylor's interest in the genealogy of "provisional painting"⁵, which in the non-commercial context of this exhibition translates to impermanency rather than incompleteness. These works may be finished but they will be revisited, able to bleed or be transferred into her future work.

In his review of Cobi Taylor's 2014 studio exhibition *Framing Violence*, Brendan Jon Philip concluded by pointing out how easy it is "to misread works in a large format as a shorthand for ambition".⁶ This is something that Robyn Jordaan has addressed in her work *I never really played*, an oversized, Otago-themed house of cards. Jordaan's scaled up works are easy metaphors, designed to brashly enter an existing local dialogue about gentrification. Her energy and ad hoc approach is translated in the way each card within the stack can be removed and taken out of the space into the wider context they are commenting on.

Activating the work day by day throughout the first week of the exhibition, Jordaan instigates discussion through the cards as though she is playing them in a larger game. Like Taylor, the work avoids remaining static as a 'finished product'. In Jordaan's hands they are more transitional structures than objects, moving between the socio-political, the comedic and what is yet to be discovered. Her entrance into this funny-serious zone is significant. In her 2013 article "Funny or serious? Not necessarily light material", artist and writer Anya Henis suggests that if the work does not hold an element of humour it is hard for her to imagine the artist having any fun creating it and therefore hard for her to take pleasure viewing it.⁷ Jordaan achieves this with her own engagement and presence within the work, actively critiquing the issue of gentrification whilst also mining the subject for her work.

An equally nimble entry into local dialogue is found in Deanna Dowling's public intervention *In search of gold, the stone was there all along*. Embedded into several cracks in the footpath between Dutybound and Blue Oyster, a mortar of Oamaru stone and gold stretch along the pavement in stark contrast to the cool damp asphalt surrounding it. These materials are deeply entrenched in a Kintsugi-like method, exposing the poor condition of the area in contrast to the city centre where roading repair work is undertaken almost daily. In this way, Dowling is provoking a sense of place as well as time; mirroring

the infrastructure of the city with its foundations. Stone and gold, millions of years in the making and used to build Dunedin—a city now economically crumbling around the edges like a block of Oamaru stone.

Dowling bares a great deal about her process in the title, which intends to juxtapose the telling quality of everyday materials. The aesthetic decision to use gold came with typical restrictions that led her to stone—a readily available material that still exposes the characteristics of the surrounding locale. A small video of moving stills in the Blue Oyster displays studio images of these raw materials as well as the stone quarry and stone buildings in Dunedin. Dowling asks the viewer to look closer at a city's functional surroundings; roads and footpaths bare no aesthetic value when compared to civic buildings or monuments. Their aesthetic is generic and globalised, "most comfortably bound to massive and invisible materialities and networks."⁸

In creating *Traversing Particles*, Tomas Richards similarly stitches together two distinct but very unique subjects: the Blue Oyster gallery and the derelict exhibition space above Dutybound. Contrasting Jordaan, Taylor and Dowling, Richards works on a barely visible plane: the smallest watermark, a hairline crack, dust blown into a corner. To Richards, every nick, stain or polish holds an embedded history, significant parts of an inorganic ecosystem of history and culture in an urban space.

A floorboard is lifted from the gallery floor and walked to the loft space; a gritty shard of glass is walked back and placed unobtrusively near the floorboard-sized hole. These reciprocal shifts and maneuvers co-implicate the two spaces, communicating their relative differences via Richards' subtle yet elaborate engagement with them.

In an almost Beuysian manner he remains conscious of the inanimate as he relocates objects between spaces over the first week of the exhibition: "A cinderblock has weight, it brushes or aches at my arm, it bites and dries my skin, sometimes it agitates me, surprises me. It makes me feel part of the world, moving with other vital things." As each space is irrevocably entangled through his traversings a subtle social sculpture is formed that explores the palpable relationship between the animate and inanimate. "Sometimes I want to be like the wind, gently influencing and sweeping and gathering humble relics in different arrangements with no end game."

Chloe Geoghegan
29 July 2015

Notes

¹ Wistan Curnow, 'High Culture in a Small Province' in *The Critic's Part: Wistan Curnow Art Writings 1971–2013* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2014), 36.

² John Hurrell. "A Look at Public Practices." *Art New Zealand*, no. 70 (Autumn 1994): 45.

³ Barbara Strathdee, "Women Artists at the F1 New Zealand Sculpture Project" in *Art New Zealand*, no. 26 (Autumn 1983): <http://art-newzealand.com/Issues21to30/womenf1.htm>

⁴ Brian O'Doherty, "Notes on the Gallery Space" from *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (San Francisco: Lapis Press, 1976), 14.

⁵ Raphael Rubinstein, "Provisional Painting" in *Art in America* (May 2009), <http://artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/provisional-painting-raphael-rubinstein/>

⁶ Brendan Jon Philip, "Unpublished Writing I, *Cobi Taylor – Framing Violence*", 18 November 2014, <http://brendanjon-philip.wordpress.com/2015/06/30/unpublished-writing-i/>

⁷ Anya Henis, "Funny or serious? Not necessarily light material" in *un Magazine* 7.1, 2013, <http://unprojects.org.au/magazine/issues/issue-7-1/funny-or-serious-not-necessarily-light-material/>

⁸ Gean Moreno and Ernesto Oroza, "Generic Objects" in *e-flux Journal* 18 (09/2010), <http://e-flux.com/journal/generic-objects/>