



(left) *mothermother iteration 12* at Lot23, Auckland, June 202, with in the foreground, Michelle Mayn's *Seeds and Sack*, and in the background, Lucy Boermans' *Resonance* (Photograph: Sam Tozer)

(below) LUCY BOERMANS
The Space In Which Energies Cross 2020
Cardboard
(Photograph: Sam Tozer)

(opposite above left)
NAT TOZER *Portrait of mothermother* 2021
Ink on paper

(opposite above right) The Guerilla Girls' analysis of the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki's exhibition history 2011–2019

(opposite below left) MICHELLE MAYN
Seeds and Sack—detail 2021
Kuruwaka & plastic sack
(Photograph: Sam Tozer)

(opposite below right) MICHELLE MAYN
Pokinini and Tanekaha 2021
Pokinikini tags, muka, copper wire, found feather, pebble & nail
(Photograph: Sam Tozer)

Auckland Michelle Mayn & Lucy Boermans *mothermother iteration 12*

Lot23, 6 June–4 July

STELLA BRENNAN

mothermother shares space with a film studio, existing in complement to another kind of space for image-making and the business of hosting.

Initiated by artist and studio co-owner, Nat Tozer, the *mothermother* project is an iterative series of exhibitions, and also an evolving and expanding network of women artists in the broadest sense.

Tozer has drawn a portrait of *mothermother*. In the drawing, the project timeline spirals out, like a thread unwinding. Each pair of exhibiting artists passes their space on to a friend, or a colleague, or both. The project unspools, hosted and sometimes steered by Tozer. Each

pair's invitation to the next participant makes explicit strands of admiration and affection, drawing out the lines of influence and mutual obligation that stitch the art world together.

In the publication for *mothermother iteration ten*, staged at the 2021 Auckland Art Fair, Robyn Walton invoked Mierle Laderman Ukeles' 1969 *Manifesto for Maintenance Art*. In this manifesto the American artist designates all her endlessly essential but invisible reproductive tasks—mothering, cleaning, feeding, fixing, keeping the customer happy—as her art practice. More than 40 years after the performance in which Ukeles spent eight hours wiping and scrubbing a museum's floor (part one of her four part 1973 *Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance—Outside and Inside*) curator Nanne Buurman is still describing the contemporary gallery's white cube as a 'neoliberal smooth space, in which invisible curatorial

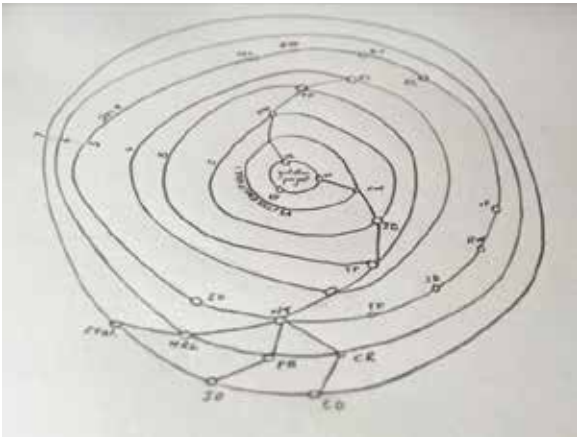
hands create the impression of an egalitarian libertarianism that glosses over existing hierarchies, exclusions, and restrictions'.¹ The contemporary art space is an institution of display that is deeply patriarchal, but now, more than ever, managed and administered by women.

Mothering is both a practical and theoretical principle. Writing about the idea of curatorial hospitality, of the curator's role in holding space for artists, Danny Butt examines the ambiguity of the artist as curator or instigator (a role Tozer inhabits). He invokes the ambiguous figure of the midwife, a necessary contributor to a birth, an attendant who functions as both host and guest. Butt also raises Gyatri Spivak's notion of the unrepayable mother-debt, the gift of being made human, an ethical response to which is to 'find modes of exchange that allow one to stay in the game, to attend to the debt without resolving it'.²

Admiration and interrelation are the ley lines of the artists' gift economy. *mothermother* exhibitors include Phillipa Blair, Judy Darragh ONZM, and collective questioners of gender and authorship et al. Other artists with wide international profiles include Hye Rim Lee and Joyce Campbell as well as new exhibitors such as weaver Kiriana O'Connell (Ngāti Tukorehe, Pākehā) and recent graduates Michelle Mayn and Lucy Boermans.

The project's current iteration, its twelfth, represents a physical conversation between Mayn and Boermans, brought together for the first time by the project. The artists installed over a three week period, coming and going separately from the





IT'S JUST AS BAD AT AUCKLAND ART GALLERY TOI O TĀMAKI



We have reviewed our statistics for exhibitions produced at the Gallery since reopening in 2021. We were quite surprised to see our statistics laid out like this. We have a long way to go in achieving an even gender distribution across our exhibitions.

As a collecting institution we work with a history, which is significantly biased towards male artists. While we were aware that just 15% of the

80% Mixed
80% of the artists were female

artists in our collection are identified as female, we thought our recent exhibition activity might look better than this.

It is also important to acknowledge that our collections database, like most collections databases, does not provide an option for artists to identify beyond the binary. This is one of many areas requiring re-examination.

PO Box 1401 Teahana Street, Auckland 1141 New Zealand **AUCKLAND ART GALLERY TOI O TĀMAKI** in collaboration with the Curator's Office, CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE ART WORLD

gallery, adjusting and responding to each other's work over that duration in a slow-motion material conversation.

A skilled weaver, Mayn's tensile arrangements of muka (harakeke fibre) evoke Maureen Lander's installations that deconstruct weaving practices and processes. In *Pokinikini and Tanekaha* reddish tanekaha-dyed tags of dried and rolled harakeke contrast with fine muka strands twined around a tiny white feather so airy it does not even weigh upon the fine aho (thread).

In *Seeds and Sack*, the mouth of a sack full of glistening harakeke seed is held open by a stone dangling from the gallery's lighting track. The seed, slowly harvested over two seasons, spills out of the open weave of the plastic sack next to a field of kuruwaka (flax pods). Stiff and hollow, the kuruwaka are stitched into a fabric backing, forming a brittle carpet with a dark sheen. In Mayn's work, skill and labour are lightly applied. For her, there is a balance that must also be struck by a Pākehā artist in honouring the kaupapa of weaving with humility and technical dedication.

There is tension and counterbalance

both within and between the work of Boermans and Mayn. Boermans uses synthetic rope and fluorescent monofilament to lace found objects together. In *Ecologies of Movement* you can hear the hum of bees coming from an air vent, while tell-tale strands of wool trail across the floor, shivering slightly in the conditioned air. *Space in which Energies Cross* is composed of remnants of a previous sound work. Coils of brown paper with punched holes unfurl across a table, others are rolled neatly on the wall. The strips record a gestural conversation, the to-and-fro of hand movements appearing as punched holes. The rolls are designed to be fed through a small wind-up music box, generating a plucked and percussive score.

A recent addition to the *mothermother* project is the incorporation of a writer with each iteration. Here Natasha Matila-Smith's text runs parallel to the installation. It is full of hair anxiety, long strands floating in the swimming pool, twining across the bedsheets, echoing the nylon and muka strung through the gallery space.

Like the mothering it invokes, *mothermother's* operation is intimate and iterative. *mothermother's* kaupapa offers a gift and a responsibility—the invitation of the next participant—to each artist or writer involved. With every gift comes the possibility of refusal and the expectation of return. Who gifts to whom and why? While honouring diversity and inclusion, the format could risk becoming a filter bubble or an echo chamber, but through Tozer's *manaakitanga*, and *mothermother's* expanding network, the project unwinds outward, exhibition by exhibition.

1. Nanne Buurman, 'Angels in the White Cube? Rhetorics of Curatorial Innocence at dOCUMENTA (13)', in *On Curating*, issue 29, May 2016, p 156. http://www.on-curating.org/files/oc/dateverwaltung/issue-29/PDF_to_Download/OnCurating_Issue29_DINA4.pdf, accessed 11 July 2021.
2. Danny Butt, 'The Curatorial as a Liveable Subject Position: Hospitality and Differential Consciousness' in *A Year of Conscious Practice*, 2016, <http://www.ayearofconsciouspractice.com/texts/curatorial-hospitality-and-differential-consciousness>, accessed 11 July 2021.

