



ESTUARY ART AND ECOLOGY PRIZE

UXBRIDGE
**MALCOLM
SMITH
GALLERY**

An estuary is defined as being a waterway where fresh and salt water meet. The function of this transitional area is to filter the water, purifying it of pollutants and sediment, resulting in cleaner coastal waters for marine life (as well as the rest of us!) to enjoy. Unfortunately, an estuary's purifying abilities can be compromised by excessive amounts of toxins and soils in the water. Such an overload is usually caused by the dumping of chemical contaminants from factories, households and vehicles into storm drains which lead to rivers, seas and estuaries. The Tāmaki Estuary is one of the most polluted waterways in the country, it is home to hundreds of species of flora and fauna who are unfortunately dying out as a result of their toxic environment. It is important that we take responsibility for keeping New Zealand green and reduce our waste output so that we can sustainably enjoy our Estuary.

The purpose of the Awards is to draw attention to the environmental concerns surrounding the Estuary and emphasise our important role in keeping it clean and safe. The finalists have astutely engaged with our local environment, demonstrating its importance as an ecosystem as well as our integral role in maintaining its wellness. Each of the artists have focused on different aspects of the Estuary and have approached artmaking in a variety of ways, contributing distinct perspectives and experiences. By closely engaging with our local context, these artists are also helping to bring to light broader ecological issues affecting our daily lives.

Anna van den Berg

The Estuary Art and Ecology Prize is facilitated by Malcolm Smith Gallery through UXBRIDGE Arts and Culture and is supported by Auckland Council and Howick Local Board, Gordon Harris and Rice Family Partnership.

Thank you to Paul Brobbel, the judge for the 2018 Prize, and a special thanks to the Tāmaki Estuary Protection Society and all of the members of our community who work tirelessly to ensure the concerns of the Estuary are continually reflected on by those who enjoy it.



FIRST PRIZE

Marion Wassenaar, *Unplugged*

Carbon book in laser etched reagent bottle, inkjet prints

The catalyst for this artwork is a book purchased in a charity shop, Auckland Unplugged: Coping with Critical Infrastructure Failure¹. The book reports on the electricity blackout that disrupted Auckland's central business district for five weeks over the summer of 1998 and reveals the vulnerability of a city's infrastructure. This crisis highlights our dependence not only on the power supply but also on the town water supply and waste management, and exacerbates a future of unsustainable uncertainty. These networks are interconnected, with population growth and consumption placing huge demands on this post-industrial oasis. In attempting to create an artwork that conveys the adverse human impact on the environment, while acknowledging the waterways of the Tāmaki Estuary and indeed the many contaminated waterways of Aotearoa, New Zealand, Auckland Unplugged is ironically reduced to pure carbon to be used as a filtering agent to hypothetically purify (or unblock) our polluted waters.

¹ Newlove, Lindy, Eric Stern and Lina Svedi. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2003.

JUDGE'S COMMENTS

A work that stands askew from the other works in the exhibition. Unplugged is, on first consideration, a challenging artwork - intelligent with possibly an element of humour to some. But tilting at the political, the bureaucratic and the pathetic, this work adds a unique element of anger and aggression to the exhibition. Unplugged is still, like all the works here, optimistic, but the artist took a much more visceral ride to get there.

SECOND PRIZE

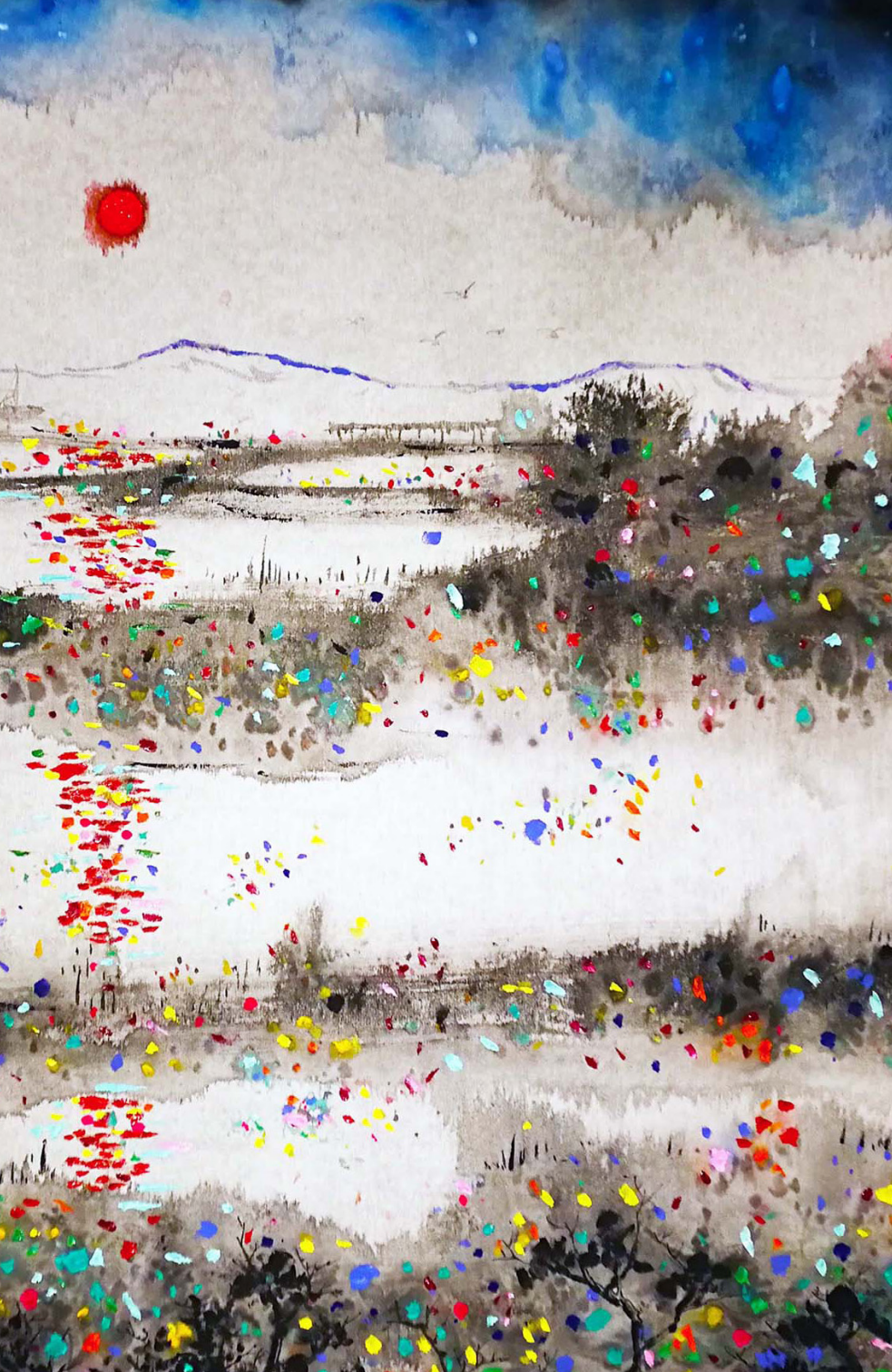
Wei Lun Ha, *Colours that I wouldn't want to see*

Water from Tāmaki Estuary, ink, acrylic with found plastics on fabric

This was painted en plein air, it is a depiction of the Tāmaki mud flats painted with found plastic objects and water from the Estuary mixed with inks. The use of these materials relates to the idea of staining and contamination. Mudflats are important food stores for birds to stock and harvest food before flying off to another destination. They are nurseries and safe environments for young fish to thrive before maturing. This painting is covered by small and big dashes of colour, they act as both eye leading devices for size, volume and density, but also as hidden symbols of the microplastics hiding in the environment. Using a combination of Chinese ink techniques and contemporary Western acrylic colours allows me to play on ideas around West meeting East. As the Asian population has increased in East Auckland I see the relevance of referencing cultural cross pollination to depict my ideas. The Chinese ink landscape relates to how in the past everything was biodegradable, non-toxic and created with zero waste, but now the contrasting issue is that we have micro plastics hidden within the world and they are taking over the pristine flora and moving into our food chain. *Colours that I wouldn't want to see* serves as a quiet warning of things degrading slowly without anyone noticing. I hope this does not become our legacy.

JUDGE'S COMMENTS

Painting has a very strong tradition with the Estuary Art and Ecology Prize so I was expecting something special in this medium. *Colours that I wouldn't want to see* was the most compelling image in the exhibition. The work is anchored by a traditional Chinese form but turned upside down by the uninvited Western colour palette. It invites but doesn't demand a closer inspection and rewards the viewer for their non-complacency.



MERIT AWARD

Michelle Farrell, *Restore Me said the Water*

Ink on paper

This work endeavours to illustrate that the natural cycles of the Tāmaki Estuary have been broken due to the cumulative effect of environmental contamination. The symbiotic connections and interrelationships of species and organisms who once cohabitated harmoniously within the Tāmaki Estuary ecosystem no longer exist. Pollution deposits and contaminants are buried deep and trapped within the Estuary's earth basin. We see at these points the severing of the natural flow of nutrients and interconnected relationships between aquatic, bird and plant life. The land and seascape appears barren as the blues and greens which often denote vibrant and healthy waters and fauna are replaced with dull greys, browns and blacks - signifying the Estuary's problem with sewage outflow, metal and other contaminants. There are still remnants of the flowing energy lines of the water and the natural healthy ecosystem which once existed. They give us hope for continuing efforts to fully restore the Estuary to health and abundance once more.

JUDGE'S COMMENTS

I was struck by numerous aspects to this work, unsure exactly why I kept returning to it - maybe the personification of the Tāmaki Estuary or perhaps the restrained and delicate quality of the image. *Restore Me said the Water* stands out in the exhibition as plaintive and calming.



MERIT AWARD

Mish O'Neill, *Mānawa*

Photogram, Fuji Flex

Mānawa: the gatekeeper between good and bad. Its ability to adapt and tolerate in the face of diversity, allowing other living creatures to thrive and rebuild. The strength and fragility of the Mānawa is present in the photogram. Imprinted with the use of light and water on colour negative paper, the saturated red evokes a feeling of warm hope for the Tāmaki Estuary.

JUDGE'S COMMENTS

The photographic works in this year's exhibition were challenging, particularly in their embrace of abstraction and 'alternative' processes. *Mānawa* is an assertive and imposing work, both amongst the photography within the exhibition and as one of the strongest images in the exhibition as a whole. This work stood out for its luminosity and confidence.



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Image: Roma Anderson, *Liminal*, 2017
Merit Award EAA11