

UNSEEN, UNKNOWN: UNVEILED

WANDA GILLESPIE, MATILDA WOODS, SARAH SMUTS-KENNEDY,
ROZANA LEE, PAMELA WOLFE, GEORGIE HILL

UXBRIDGE
**MALCOLM
SMITH
GALLERY**

Unseen, Unknown: Unveiled asks us to consider what is visible and what is invisible and to what extent we perceive each in forming meaning and knowledge. Simply seeing something certainly is not to know it. Concrete materiality and elusive immateriality impress themselves to various extents and it is often the embedded immaterial sensations that are essential to our knowledge and understanding of something. Take an object or a landscape for example, because of our subjective experience one may 'see' in these things much more than another: an invisible history, a beauty, a process, an aura. The metaphor of the veil, or more precisely unveiling, used here describes a transition in perception; transition from seeing something purely as it appears, to having a greater understanding of what it is.

Ben Abdale-Weir

PUBLIC PROGRAMMES

Bright Ideas: Featuring Wanda Gillespie

Two speakers from different creative backgrounds will share projects, ideas, and artistic wisdom.

Wednesday 9 May, 10AM

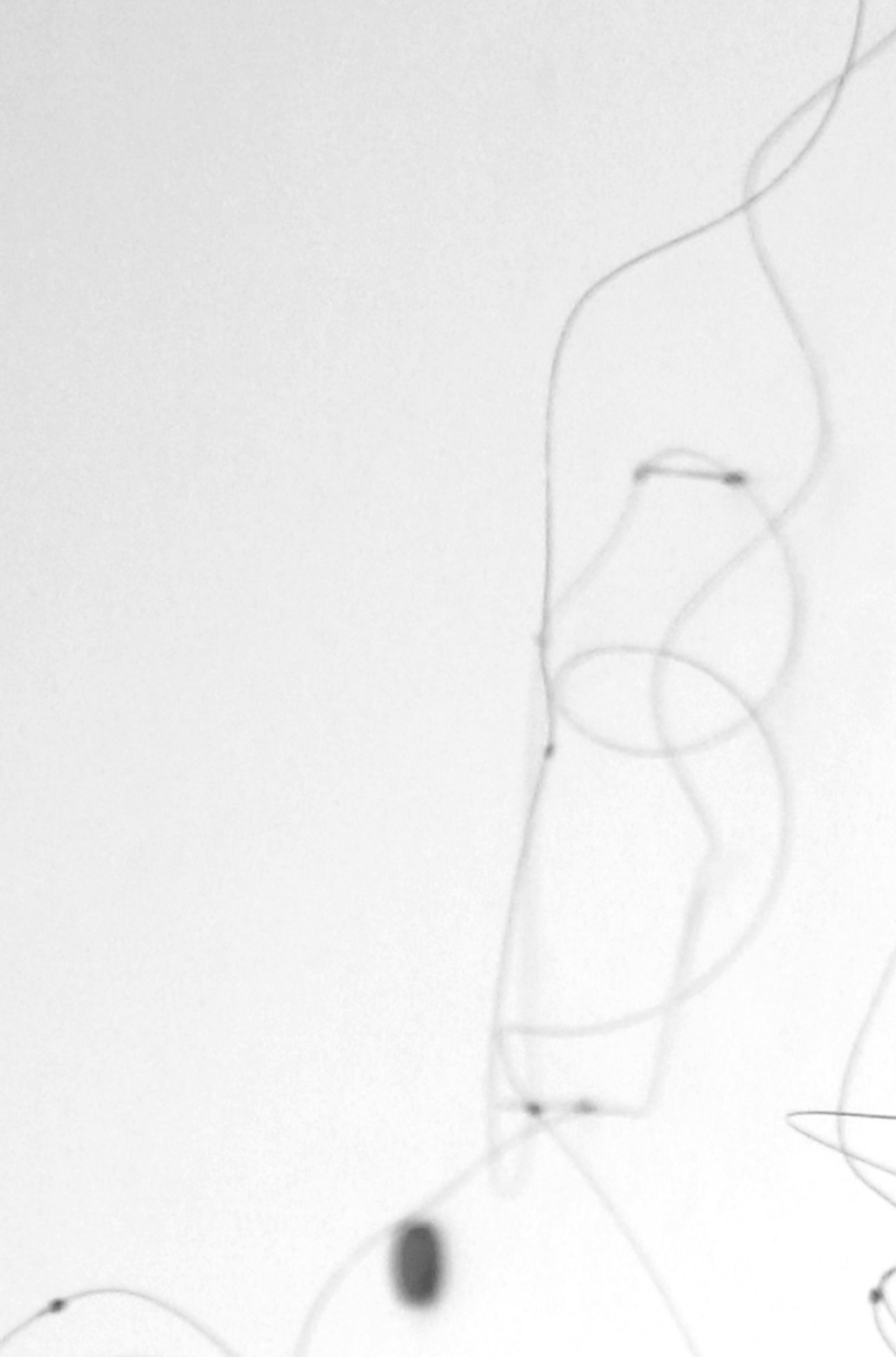
Curator and Artist Discussion

Join co-curator Zoe Hoeberigs for an in-depth look at the exhibition.

Thursday 17 May, 11.30AM

These programmes are presented as
part of the Arts Out East Festival
See artsouteast.org.nz/festival/ for details

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My first encounter with *Unseen, Unknown: Unveiled* was the exhibition poster that features a photograph of a carved wooden face with closed eyes. The photograph is cropped to fill the page. The rings of the wood are visible as are the individual hairs of the fur cloak that meets snug under the figure's chin. The experience of the image prefigures my experience of this exhibition that includes work by Matilda Woods, Georgie Hill, Rozana Lee, Pamela Wolfe, Wanda Gillespie, and Sarah Smuts-Kennedy. All these works have a certain quietness, they invite you to venture closer and pay attention to subtle details — the edge of a chair or the translucency of pink fabric for example.

When Rozana Lee introduces her painting practice she immediately mentions her family. She talks about growing up in Indonesia and living above her parents' fabric shop; about how she would sometimes fall asleep on piles of fabric. Thanks to her parents, she doesn't remember a time when she wasn't collecting fabrics. Her paintings in the exhibition consist of colourful fabric shapes carefully collaged onto creamy calico. The collaging involves uprooting fabric from one background and then attaching it to another. Lee likens this displacement to her own story as a third generation Chinese woman from Indonesia, who immigrated to Singapore, China and most recently New Zealand. The stories and memories contained in the fabrics allow Lee to reconnect with places and family histories. She is knowledgeable about the history behind all the fabrics she uses, and tells me how the Chinese cloud pattern in one painting connects to other cultures around the world. Lee says the history of fabric can connect people to places they didn't think they had anything in common with. She collages fabrics from different countries and cultures together easily, respecting their differences but acknowledging their similarities, encouraging the viewer to consider their own awareness and appreciation of cultures.

Matilda Woods' practice focuses on domestic environments and everyday objects. She tells me how spending time at home after her son was born helped her appreciate the humble beauty of domestic spaces and objects. This led her to use tartan woollen blankets in her work. These unassuming blankets evoke homely surroundings, and carry sentiment for people like Woods and myself who used them as children. In *Diptych Paintings*, Woods uses two woollen blankets as canvases. She transforms the blankets into formal paintings by responding to their materiality, applying dark house paint in squares to conceal parts of their checkered patterns. In earlier blanket works, Woods used a 'rule-based' system to conceal the patterns, but in *Diptych Paintings* (2017) she uses her own intuition and sense of symmetry to make the paintings. By engaging with the blankets as a form of found abstraction and presenting them as paintings, Woods draws our attention to a humble domestic object that often goes unnoticed.

Georgie Hill writes to me about the two chairs depicted in her painting, *Back to Back (Eileen Gray Non Conformist Chair with Ruhlmann Defenses Chair)* (2013). These chairs are created with monochrome watercolour patterns that prompt the viewer to look closer to distinguish the shape of each. Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann's Defenses chair (1927) is on the left; and Eileen Gray's asymmetrical Non Conformist chair (1926) (made from a singular piece of steel with only one armrest), is on the right. The painting is one from a series by Hill that refers to Gray, the pioneer of modernist design who was largely unrecognised for decades. Hill uses painting techniques in *Back to Back* that seek to acknowledge Gray and respond to the history of modernist design. The camouflage-like watercolour patterns she uses reference craft forms like collage and decorative work that have historically been excluded from modernism.

Hill's patterns both conceal and reveal the chair designed by Eileen Gray, whose work was often concealed within modernist histories.

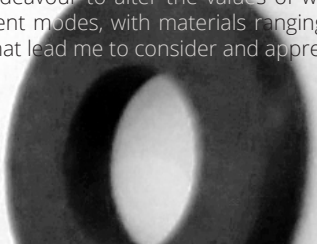
Pamela Wolfe makes paintings of floral and botanical arrangements that reference traditional still life paintings. She tells me how this subject matter was prompted by her childhood surrounded by plants and flowers due to her family's love of gardening. Wolfe references past art movements such as Dutch traditional still life paintings, and by doing so achieves a certain timelessness in her paintings. *Large Roses in Glass Vase* (2016) is an oil painting that magnifies a flower arrangement to almost four times its original size. The richly coloured and detailed roses lure the viewer closer, tempting them to touch. The large scale glorifies the flowers, yet also emphasises the fleeting moment in their short life that Wolfe has captured. When I ask what Wolfe finds so captivating about still lifes, she says she finds joy in the infinite variety of plants and flowers nature has created and the different ways they can be painted. Wolfe says plants are a metaphor for the impermanence and fragility of our own lives and their preservation is crucial to our survival. This statement makes me think about how she is able to preserve flowers in her own way through her paintings.

Seeker 2 (Kai) (2016) shows a carved wooden figure reclining across two upright logs. The figure is draped in fur, with closed eyes and a peaceful expression on their face. Their position and closed eyes suggest levitation, however they remain grounded on the logs. Wanda Gillespie describes her artworks as artefacts, often from another time, place or field. She is interested in giving her objects new functions and describes older works that perform in this way such as a winged scissor-lift, and musical lawnmower. Although the medium and objects Gillespie uses shift, she has always been interested in the spiritual realm. She often presents fictional texts alongside her work to establish the artefacts as found objects. *Seeker 2 (Kai)* (2016) is set in a fictional apocalyptic future, and on other occasions has been accompanied by a narrative text about its origin. The fictionalised narrator of this text described how his great grandmother carved the work to guide the meditation and levitation practices of the seekers to aid them on their path to transcendence.

Sarah Smuts-Kennedy's artworks are not formal arrangements or metaphors. When speaking to me about her practice, she emphasises that her works are tools that perform a function. She describes *Flow Forms* (2015-2018) as an exercise about the power of the line, composed using delicate lines and shapes moulded from fine copper and steel wires. Smuts-Kennedy explains the function of this work to me by using an analogy about digging a drain. When you begin digging a drain, she says, at first you may not notice a lot of water in the area. But once you have dug the drain, water will appear and it will find the channel. The drain becomes a pathway for water you didn't know was there. Like the drain, the copper and wire lines in Smuts-Kennedy's work attract the unseen energy that already exists in the room. The copper directs the flow of energy from one place to another. Smuts-Kennedy focuses on relationships between energy and biological systems, developing the flow between the two to heighten the resonance of the space.


The artists in *Unseen, Unknown: Unveiled* share an interest in rendering the invisible visible. Their practices endeavour to alter the values of what is undervalued. The artists work in very different modes, with materials ranging from woollen blankets to unseen energy flows, that lead me to consider and appreciate the power of small gestures.

Tasha Jenkins









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Image: Wanda Gillespie, *Seeker 2 (Kai)* 2016
woodcarving (Ash), fur, fabric