

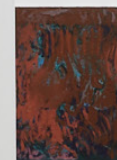
# Campbell Patterson

Michael Lett  
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Cnr K Rd & East St  
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New Zealand  
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**Campbell Patterson**  
**half heart I**  
**2023**  
oil on canvas  
1200 x 900 mm  
NZD 11,500.00





Campbell Patterson  
Notions  
Installation view, Michael Lett, 2023



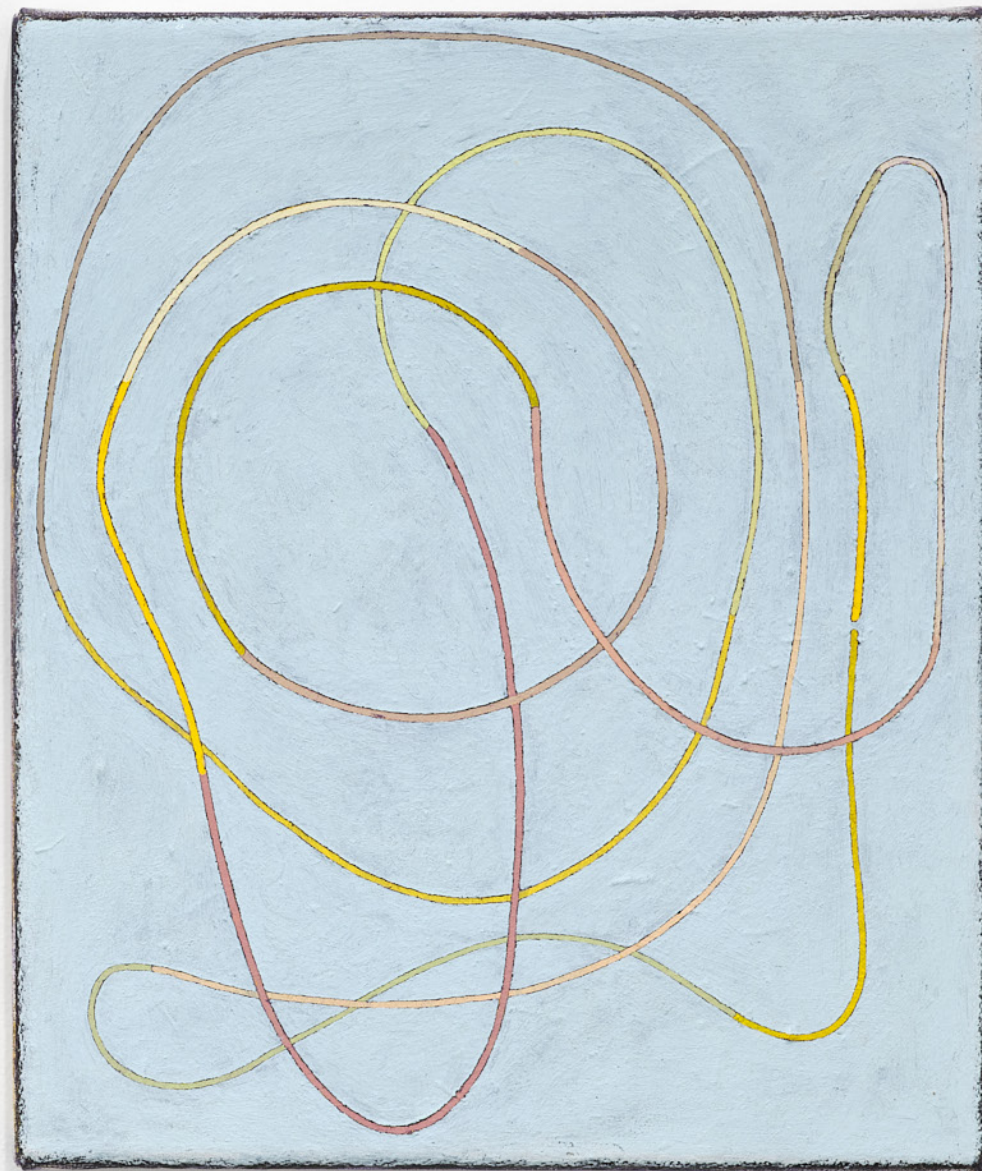
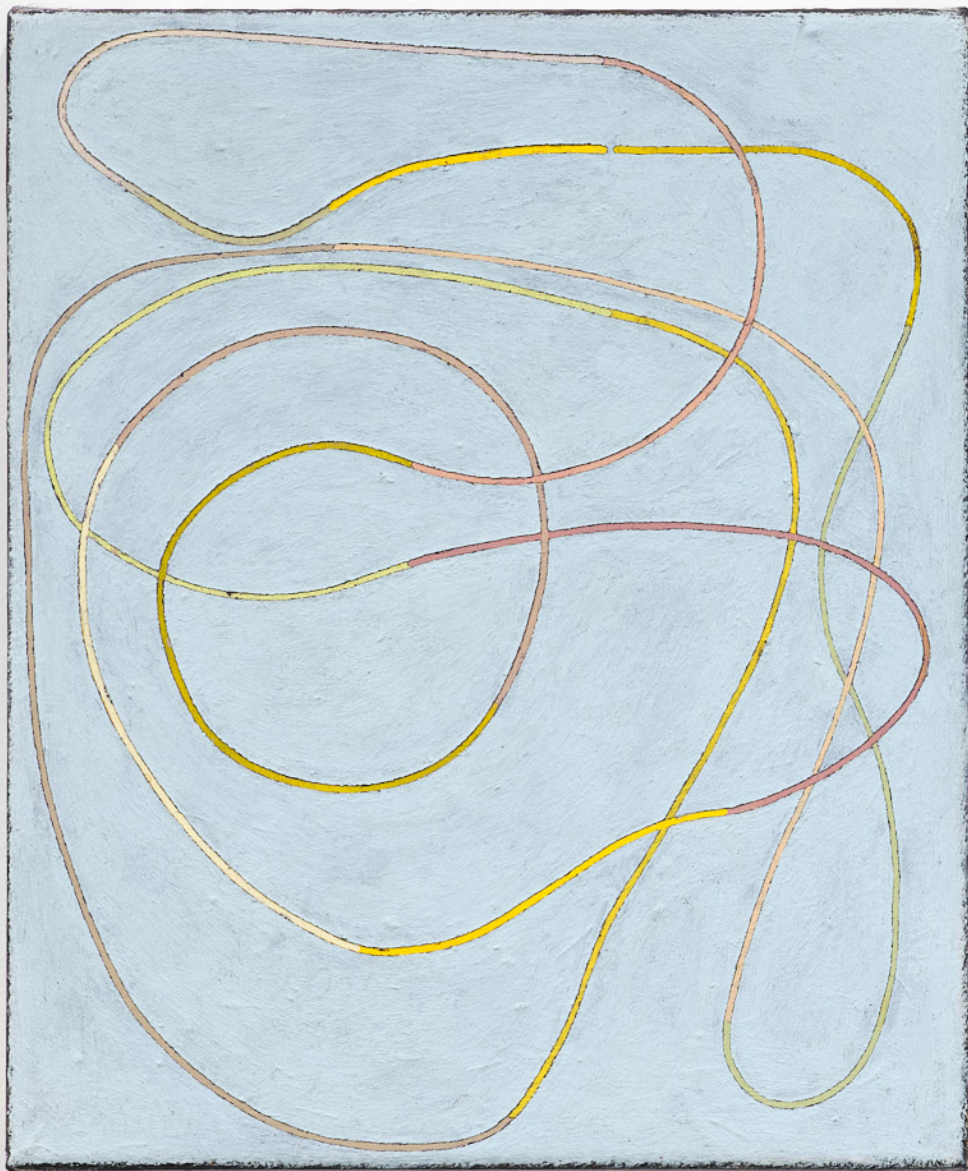
Campbell Patterson  
Notions  
Installation view, Michael Lett, 2023





Campbell Patterson  
Notions  
Installation view, Michael Lett, 2023





Campbell Patterson  
routine  
2019  
oil on canvas  
diptych, each 300 x 250mm  
NZD 8,000.00





**Campbell Patterson**  
**Notions**  
Installation view, Michael Lett, 2023



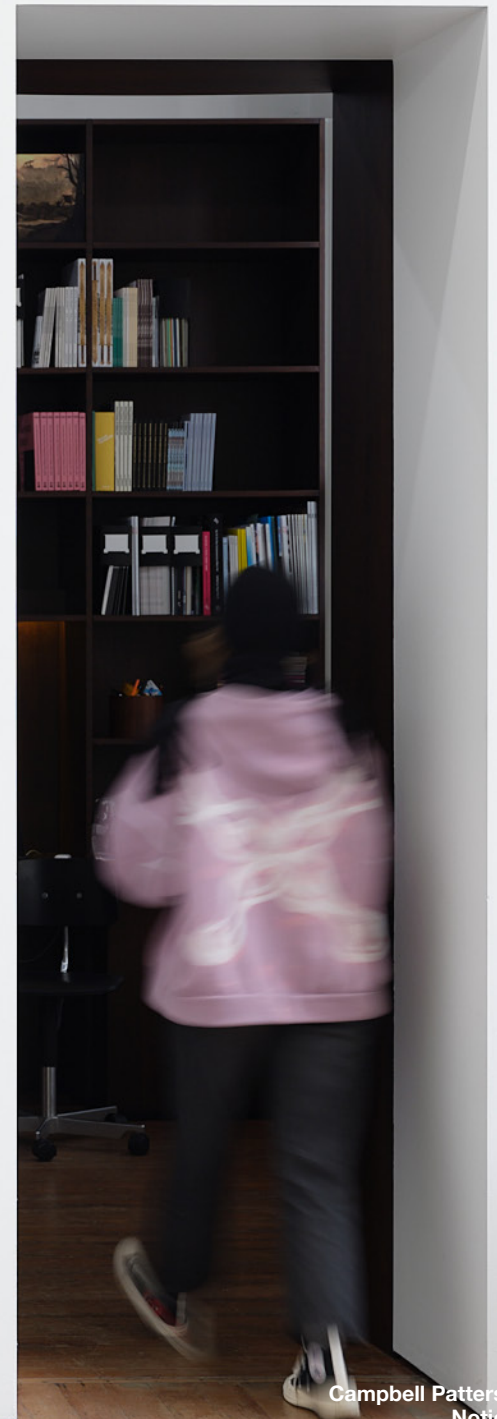
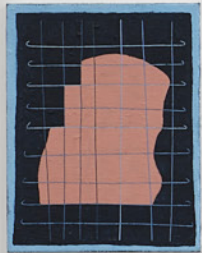
**Campbell Patterson**  
**half heart III**  
**2023**  
oil on canvas  
1000 x 750mm  
NZD 9,500.00





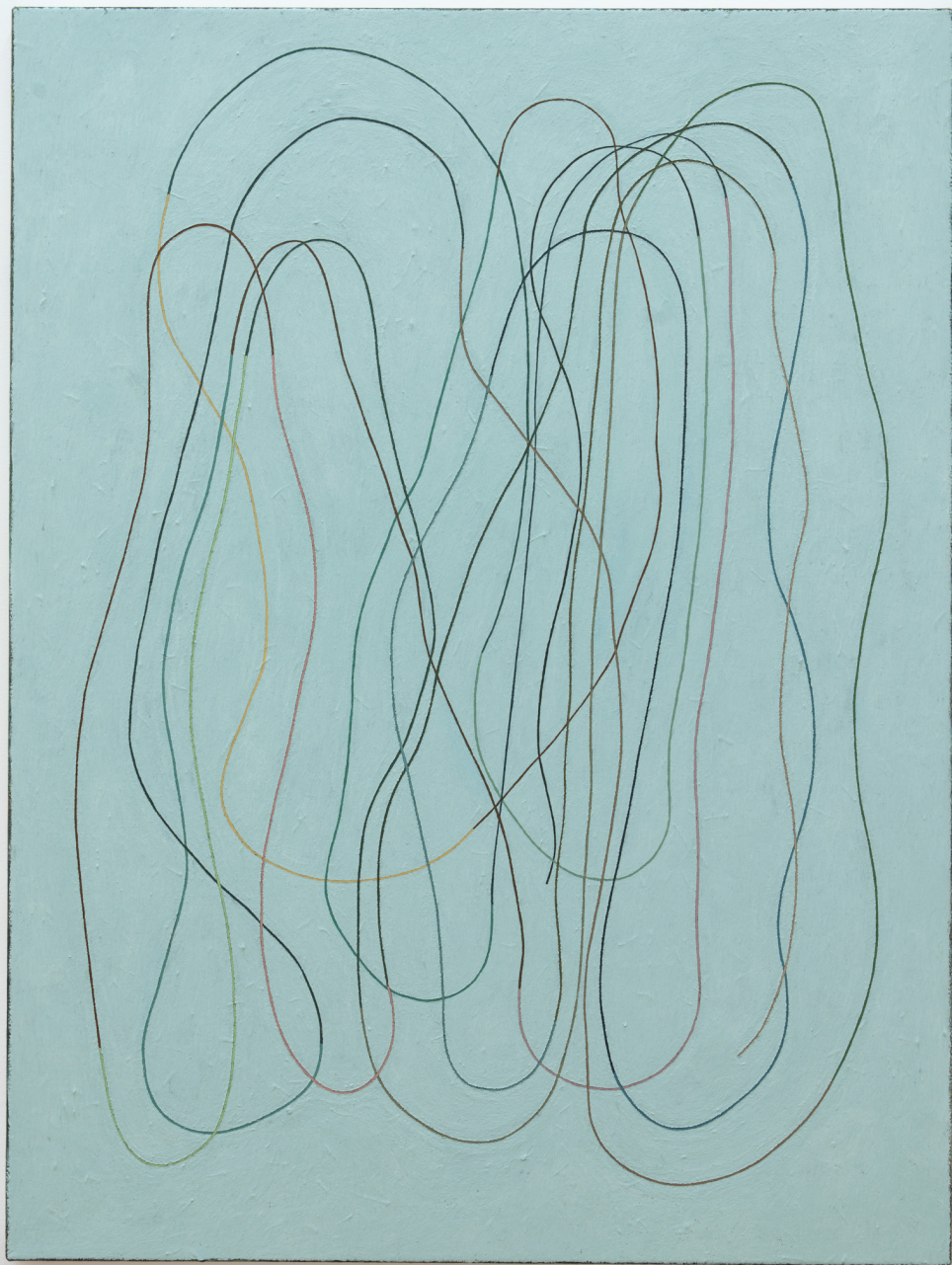


Campbell Patterson  
Notions  
Installation view, Michael Lett, 2023



Campbell Patterson  
Notions  
Installation view, Michael Lett, 2023





Campbell Patterson Diary (front)  
2021  
oil on canvas  
1000 x 750mm





Campbell Patterson Diary (front) (detail)  
2021  
oil on canvas  
1000 x 750mm



the body and its outside  
Installation view, Michael Lett, 2021





Campbell Patterson  
diaries  
Installation view, Michael Lett, 2019



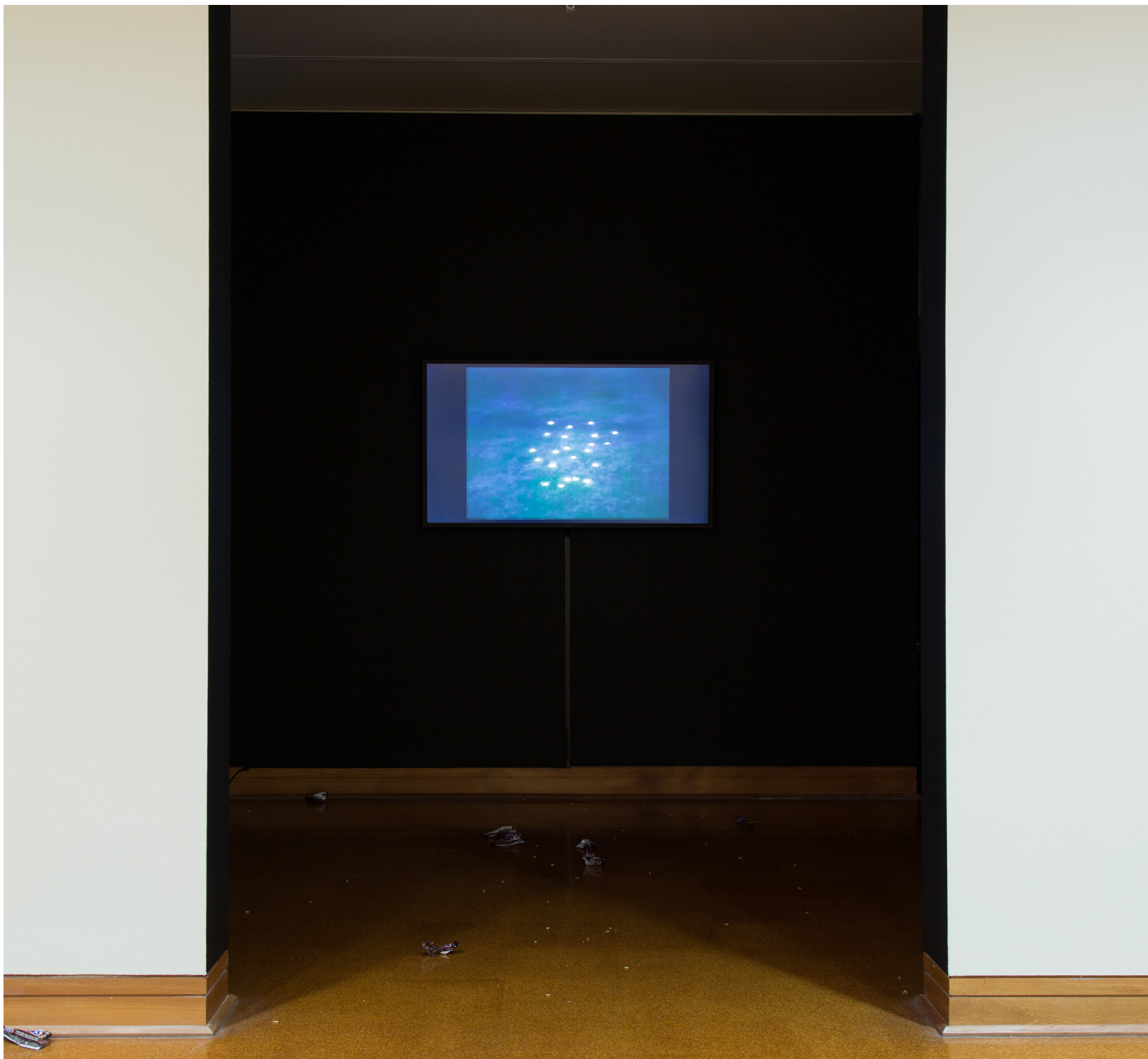
**Campbell Patterson**  
**diaries**  
Installation view, Michael Lett, 2019





Campbell Patterson  
*toot floor*  
Installation view  
Hocken Collections, Dunedin  
February 2018





Campbell Patterson  
*toot floor*  
Installation view  
Hocken Collections, Dunedin  
February 2018





Campbell Patterson  
*Lifting My Mother For As Long As I Can*  
Installation view  
Si Shang Art Museum, Beijing  
March 2017







Campbell Patterson  
*Nau Sea*  
2017  
unique photocopy on 250gsm paper  
421 x 297mm  
CP5032 / CP5034





Campbell Patterson  
*Kold* (beard, sock, glove, underpants, hat, sunglasses, t-shirt)  
2017  
VHS transferred to digital file  
suite of 8 films, each on a continuous loop





Campbell Patterson  
*Escape 1 / Escape 2 / Escape 3*  
digital video  
Installation view  
Dunedin Public Art Gallery  
June 2017





Campbell Patterson  
*call sick*  
Installation view  
Dunedin Public Art Gallery  
June 2017





Campbell Patterson  
*call sick*  
Installation view  
Dunedin Public Art Gallery  
June 2017





Campbell Patterson  
*Ghost*  
2016  
oil, poppy seeds, sesame seeds on canvas  
500 x 500mm  
CP4492-1





Campbell Patterson  
*ex-lover*  
2016

hand treated denim, stitching, hardware  
installation dimensions variable



Campbell Patterson  
*Honky Tonkin'*  
Installation view  
Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery  
November 2015



and do all his photocopying for him. Billy comes over and asks if I need a break. I say that I don't know and he shrugs his shoulders and says 'you may as well'. Spend the whole break in the workroom typing up the notes from the last two hours. Go back to sp3, ask Sam how it has been. He only says that he rang the bell for backup

It is quiet. Nobody comes to the desk for ten minutes. Then it gets busy. A girl who speaks no English needs a visitor pass but there are none. I print some and quickly cut them up. Right at the end of the hour a lady wants to scan some old photographs. She has a whole envelope of them. I try to do it but it doesn't work. I do not know why. Ask Kahe how and he shows me a way but it still doesn't work. I tell the lady that there is a problem with her usb and to come back with another one. Leave the desk.

11-12 I go to the workroom and wait for the team meeting. There are lots of conversations going on at the same time. Eventually everybody is ready and it is time to go upstairs. We all go up together. Too many people are crammed into one elevator. There are no cups. Richard is there says 'no cups, oh my god'. We sit in the staff cafeteria. Tracey is chosen to take notes. Barb says she is feeling jaded because she slept badly. Libby says she is feeling perky. We go around the table and everybody says how they are feeling. A zine is passed



Campbell Patterson  
*Honky Tonkin'*  
Installation view  
Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery  
November 2015





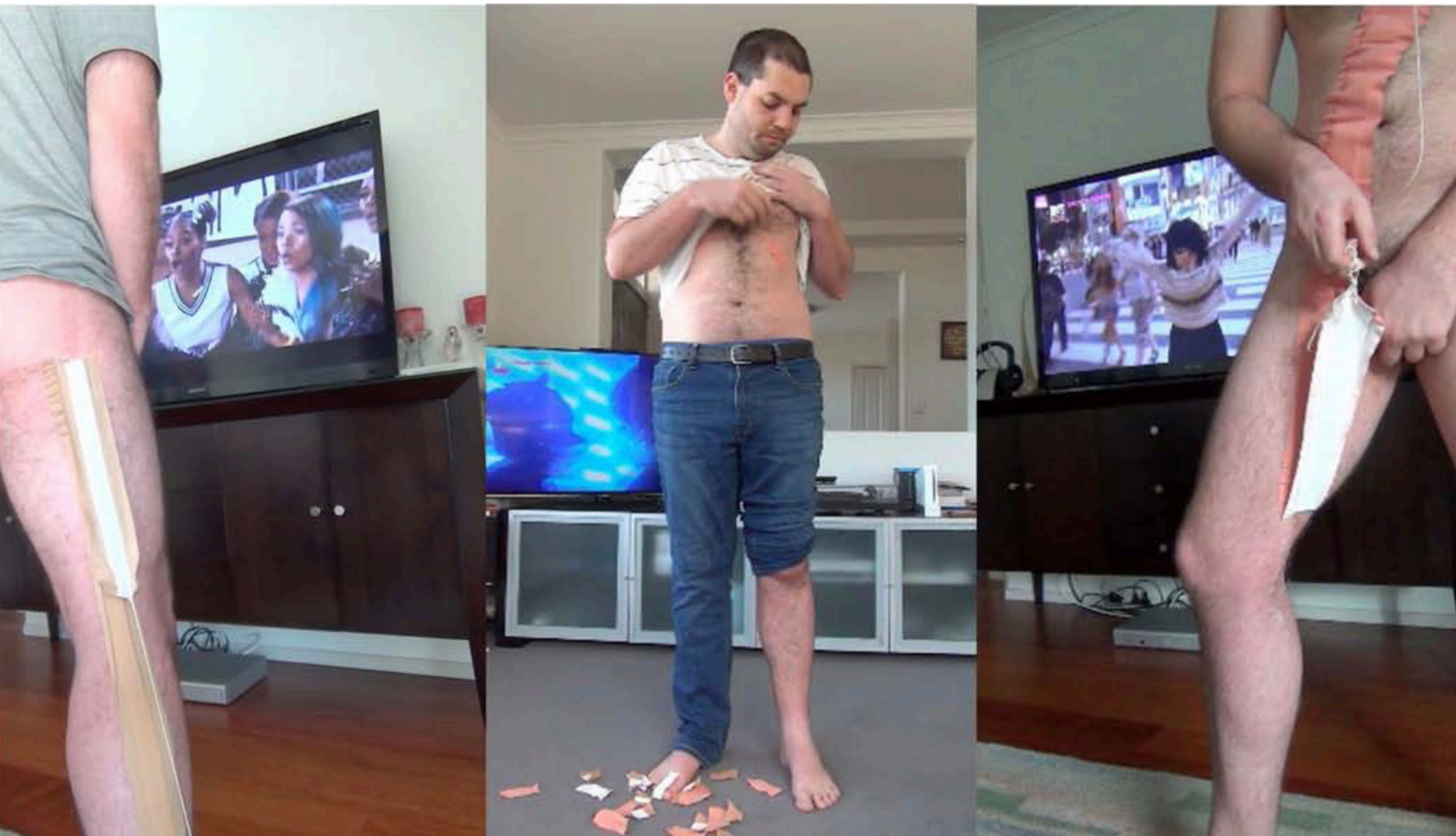
Campbell Patterson  
*Swipecard*  
2014  
oil on canvas  
CP3629-01





Campbell Patterson  
*new normal music*  
2015  
Michael Lett  
September 2015



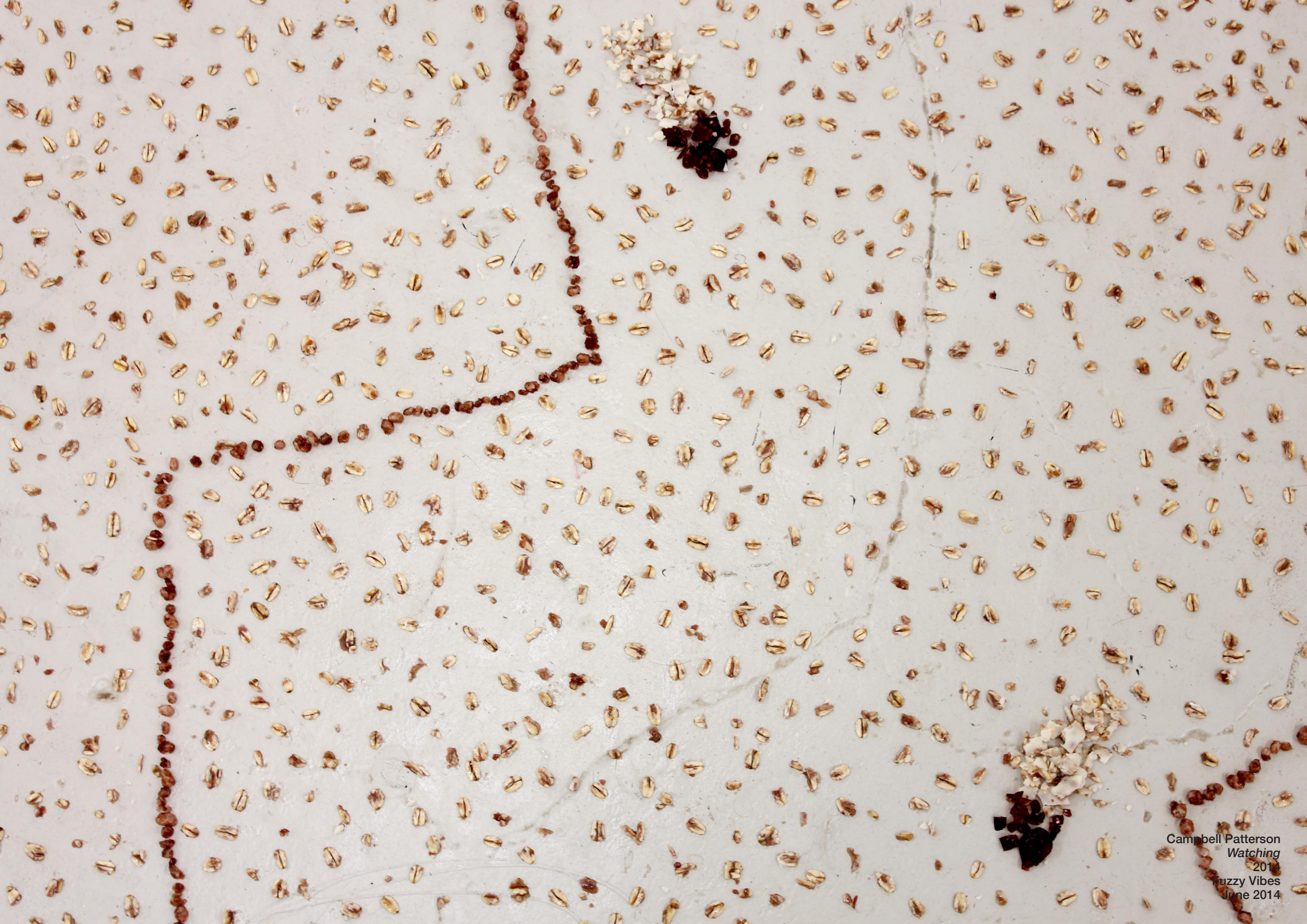






Campbell Patterson  
*Watching*  
2014  
Fuzzy Vibes  
June 2014













Campbell Patterson  
*Back in the World*  
Installation view  
Michael Lett  
March 2014





Campbell Patterson  
*No Sleep (Animal) / Passive Aggressive Vol 3*  
2013  
oil on canvas  
500 x 500mm  
CP3071 / CP3070





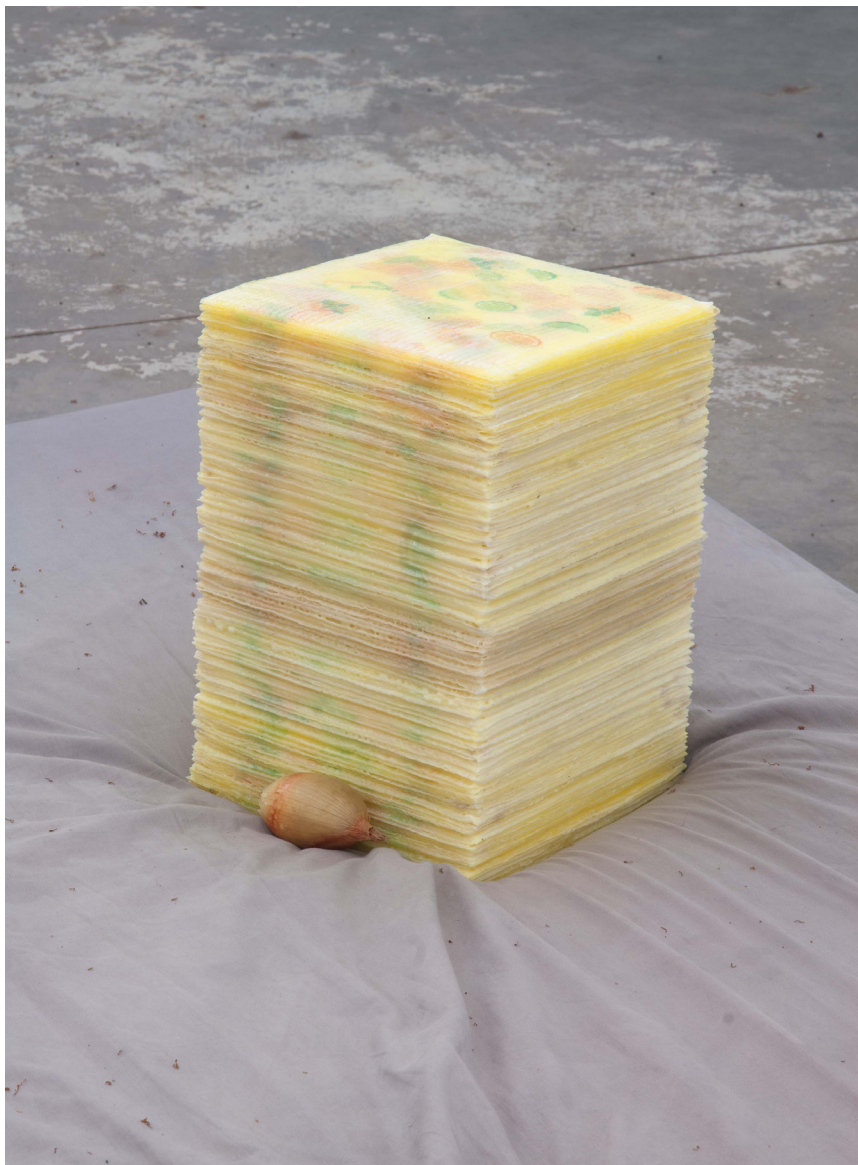
Campbell Patterson  
*Nestbeschmutzer*  
Installation view  
Southard Reid  
May 2013





Campbell Patterson  
*So Tired*  
Installation view  
Michael Lett  
February 2012





Campbell Patterson  
*Summer / Untitled*  
2012  
mattress, pva glue, paper towels, tobacco, onion / wood, double sided cello tape, string  
1950 x 1530 x 460mm / 370 x 223 x 42mm  
CP2569 / CP2478





Campbell Patterson  
rws  
2011  
towel, sultana bran, spit, pins  
two parts, 900 x 1170mm  
CP2216



## Campbell Patterson

Born 1983 in Portsmouth, England  
Lives and works in Auckland, New Zealand

Campbell Patterson creates works in an interchangeable array of media that evoke the mundane, repetitive, but frequently sublime aspects of everyday living and suburban experience. In his video work, Patterson often transforms his body into an absurd domestic tool, such as in the ongoing series *Lifting my mother for as long as I can* (2006– ). Particularly through the use of repetition, Patterson invokes the conceptual tradition of mid-twentieth century through figures like Stanley Brouwn and On Kawara—transplanted into the contexts of domestic Aotearoa environments.

### EDUCATION

2006  
Bachelor of Fine Arts, Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, New Zealand

### RESIDENCIES

2022: Headlands, San Francisco; Gasworks, London  
2017: Frances Hodgkins Fellowship, Dundedin  
2015: Artist in Residence McCahon House, Titirangi

### SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2023  
Notions, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)  
Group Portrait, Phillida Reid, London (group)

2021  
the body and its outside, Michael Lett, Auckland (group)

2020  
Contact Us, Cement Fondu, Sydney (group)  
Cold Lake, OLGA, Dunedin (solo)

2019  
diaries, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)  
toot floor, Pah Homestead, Auckland (solo)  
Personal Space, Circuit Artist Video Commissions, Artspace, Auckland,

Christchurch Art Gallery and Ramp Gallery, Hamilton (group)  
Console Whispers, Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Dunedin (group)

2018  
toot floor, Hocken Collections, Dunedin (solo)  
They Say I Look Like My Mother, 55 Sydenham Road, Sydney (group)  
Space Suit, Textiles, Sculpture and the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Collection, Dunedin Public Art Gallery (group)  
Object Failures, Hastings City Art Gallery (group)

2017  
Call Sick, Dunedin Public Art Gallery (solo)  
Moods of Infinity, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)  
Recent Acquisitions, Recent Developments, Si Shang Art Museum, Beijing (group)  
Task Action: Jim Allen, Bruce Barber, Campbell Patterson, The Dowse Art Museum, Wellington (group)

2016  
Performance Portraits, Auckland Art Gallery (group)  
Economy, West Space, Melbourne (group)  
Discoveries, Art Basel Hong Kong (Michael Lett) (solo)  
Inhabiting Space, Adam Art Gallery, Wellington (group)  
Light Switch and Conduit, The Jim Barr & Mary Barr Collection, Dunedin Public Art Gallery (group)

2015  
Honky Tonkin', Te Uru, Auckland (solo)  
new normal music, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)  
Art as a Verb, Artspace, Sydney (group)  
i) Duplex Cling Mob, Michael Lett, Auckland (group)  
Implicated and Immune, Michael Lett, Auckland (group)

2014  
watching, Fuzzy Vibes, Auckland (solo)  
Art as a Verb, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne (group)  
Back in the World, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)  
The network was desperate for new hits, Dog Park Art Project Space, Christchurch, New Zealand (group)

2013  
Nestbeschmutzer, Southard Reid Gallery, London, United Kingdom (group)  
21st-Century Collecting : Recent Aquisitions From The VUW Art Collection, Adam



Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (group)  
Vision Mixer, Suter Art Gallery, Nelson, New Zealand (group)  
Hue and Cry Lightbox Project, Courtney Place Lightboxes, Wellington, New Zealand (group)  
Campbell Patterson @ 30upstairs, 30upstairs, Wellington, New Zealand (solo)

2012

Steve Carr, Len Lye and Campbell Patterson, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
Letter from Alice May Williams, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
HEIRS, 55 Sydenham Rd, Sydney, Australia (group)  
There's a Hole in the Sky, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney, Australia (group)  
Made Active: The Chartwell Show, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
So Tired, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand (solo)

2011

Boys from the Black Stuff, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand (group)  
Auckland Art Fair, Michael Lett Stand, Auckland, New Zealand (solo)  
Without Words, Centre for Contemporary Photography (CCP), Melbourne, Australia (group)  
Reason and Rhyme, Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne, Australia (group) Also at St Paul St Gallery, AUT, Auckland  
Mother (with Agatha Gothe Snape), Society, Sydney (two person)

2010

Unnerved, The New Zealand Project, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia (group)  
Also at NGV International, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia  
Orewa, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand (solo)  
Ready to Roll, City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (group)  
The 6th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT6), Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia (group)  
Melbourne Art Fair with Artspace Gallery, Melbourne, Australia (group)

2009

Oubliette, On The Table, Wellington, New Zealand (group)  
Floorshow, Artspace, Auckland (solo)  
Liste 09, Michael Lett Stand, Basel (group presentation)  
Kind of Blue: new acquisitions and loans, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand (group)  
O.K., Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
Ambient 3, Newcall Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (solo)

2008

Work and Exercise, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand (solo)  
Party, Happy Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
Various Artists, New Zealand Film Archive, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
Artists Film Festival, New Zealand Film Archive, Wellington, New Zealand (group)  
Paintings, Window, University of Auckland, New Zealand (group)

2007

Lost And Found Video Programme, Wellington City Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (group)  
Fronting Up, Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (group)  
Campbell Patterson and Daniel Munn present 2 in 1, Rm 103, Auckland, New Zealand (two person)  
How W.H. Auden spends the night in a friend's house, Gambia Castle, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
Square2, Wellington City Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (solo)  
Group show!, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
Video Excrement, Window, University of Auckland, New Zealand (solo)

2006

Michael Lett in Wellington, Flat 2/7 Hawker street, New Zealand (group)  
Big Small, 146c Karangahape Road, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
Projection spells, 146c K road, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2006 (group) (organiser and exhibitor)  
Action interaction, 146c K road, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2006 (group) (organiser and exhibitor)  
Eenie Minee Mo, New Zealand Film Archive, George Fraser Gallery and Viewfinder, Auckland, New Zealand (group)

2005

Home Movies (with Anna Murray), Canary Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand (two person)  
None of them knew they were robots, Stanbeth House, Auckland, New Zealand (group)  
By any means, New Zealand Film Archive, George Fraser Gallery and Viewfinder, Auckland, New Zealand (group)

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Auckland, New Zealand



## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

2023

Jasmine Gallagher, “Sorry...Ummm”: Mystery, Mark Fisher and Laughter’  
*contemporaryhum.com*

2018

Campbell Patterson, *toot floor*. Dunedin: Hocken Collections

Edward Hanfling, ‘toot floor Jekyll and Hyde at the Hocken,’ *Art New Zealand*, Issue 167, Spring 2018

Rebecca Fox, ‘Emerging into the Light’ *Otago Daily Times*, 15 February 2018

2017

Campbell Patterson, *blue cheyenne #80* (artist book)

David Eggleton, ‘Campbell Patterson: call sick,’ *Art New Zealand*, Spring 2017

‘Campbell Patterson: the artists are present’ *ArtZone*

2015

Melissa Keys, ‘Curious Poetry’ *Art Collector*, [www.artcollector.net.au](http://www.artcollector.net.au)

George Watson, ‘One More Day,’ Auckland: McCahon House Trust

2014

Tim Gentles and Campbell Patterson, *CampbellFrieda*, Auckland, Michael Lett

2011

Jim and Mary Barr, ‘Watching Campbell Patterson for 12 minutes and 38 seconds’  
*Artspace*, Vol. 2, Auckland: Artspace NZ





# “Sorry ... Ummm”: Mystery, Mark Fisher, and Laughter

## A Conversation with Campbell Patterson

by Jasmine Gallagher

Published on 06.03.2023

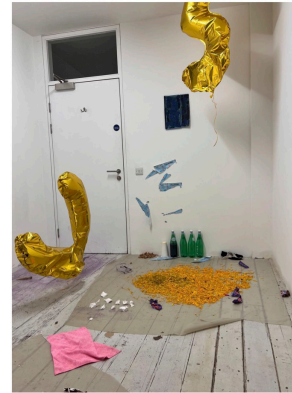


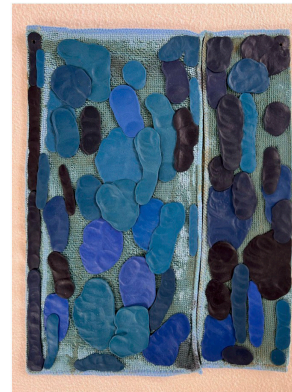
Image documenting Patterson's studio during Gasworks residency, 8th December 2022, 1:58am. Image courtesy of Campbell Patterson.



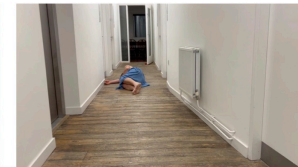
Campbell Patterson, *Interview*, 2022, digital video, 9 min 56 sec. Made during Patterson's Gasworks residency. Image courtesy of Campbell Patterson.



Moments from November 2021 written onto a piece of masking tape stuck to the floor. Still from Campbell Patterson, *nowhere 2*, 2022, digital video, 41 min 24 sec. Made during Patterson's Headlands residency, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.



Campbell Patterson, *torso*, 2022, acrylic, wood glue, rags. Courtesy of Campbell Patterson.



Artist lies on the floor covered by a blue airplane blanket, tries to sleep, rolls over to turn on the automatic lights whenever they turn off. Still from Campbell Patterson, *sleep*, 2022, digital video, 43 min 11 sec, made during Patterson's Gasworks residency, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.



Work in progress during Patterson's Gasworks residency, 2022. Image courtesy of Campbell Patterson.



Artist rubs blue paint and wood glue on his foot to create a blue ball. Still from Campbell Patterson, *blue foot*, 2022, digital video, 12 min 43 sec, made during Patterson's Headlands residency, 2022. Courtesy of Campbell Patterson.



*Poet and researcher Jasmine Gallagher and visual artist Campbell Patterson met for the first time when they became flatmates as Gallagher was beginning her PhD and Patterson carried out the 2017 Frances Hodgkins Fellowship, both at the University of Otago in Ōtepoti Dunedin, Aotearoa New Zealand. Two years later, Patterson won the Fulbright-Wallace Arts Trust Award, which funds a ten-week residency at Headlands Center for the Arts in Sausalito, California and in May 2020, Patterson was awarded a three-month residency at Gasworks in London. By this stage in the unfolding global pandemic all plans for international travel and work were—at best—tentative, but Patterson was finally able to complete these periods of work in 2022. The two shared a conversation with HUM that traverses the full spectrum of life that happened amongst these milestones and the potential of nocturnal, absurd, and unseen processes for physical and emotional healing.*

JASMINE GALLAGHER I read something the other day about how a joke that needs to be explained often loses its humorous effect. I think this aspect of a joke, the following laughter, and the healing potential of laughter all relate to how you have described your practice to me in the past, because it is not so outcome-focused or explainable in an instrumental sense, but dwells more in a space of indeterminacy, ambivalence, and the open-ended process of making itself. In contrast, I read about your residencies online where there are explanations and videos about your work and intentions for your time there.<sup>[01]</sup> Do you feel like the residency websites give a good overview of the projects now that you have completed them?

CAMPBELL PATTERSON I had a read of what is on the websites and, no, I don't think that they really sum up my residencies that well. Most of what is on the Gasworks and Headlands websites is more relevant to where I was at in 2020, when I was supposed to do both residencies.<sup>[02]</sup> A lot about the way that I work doesn't really fit into the box of how residencies work; I don't even really think of them as projects, more specific periods of life and work. On the Gasworks page there is a promotional video of me talking about my work. During the residency I made my own

edit of the interview they shot for that video. My edit is mostly just “umm” and “sorry” and shows a very real struggle to articulate anything into words. I felt like it spoke more to my way of working and was a more genuine representation of my project than what is on the website, which makes less sense to me when I try to watch it. I shared my edit as a work displayed during my open studio at Gasworks and the staff had a good laugh. They were even considering my request to replace the promotional video on their website with my edit. I struggle with this kind of direct talking on the best of days but that day was particularly bad. Luckily, failed attempts and struggle are things I am interested in so after a few days feeling despair over the interview I had a bit of a breakthrough moment with it.

JG Your edit of that video sounds great, and as though it certainly has some humour in it, which I often see in your work. I suppose the difference between the two videos highlights the way that artists are often required to publicise their practice in this neoliberal era, in order to gain funding and residencies, court dealers, or appeal directly to the consumer via social media and personal branding. Neoliberalism is a systemic pressure that artists and institutions all have to navigate, whether in public or privatised funding environments. As a system for distributing resources, it sets up a contest wherein artists and institutions are pressured to perform ideas and identities that are culturally desirable while advancing their own, more specific, ideas and practices. Within this context it feels like art is regularly instrumentalised, often in the name of promoting marginalised identities by working towards some kind of social justice, which has in turn become intertwined with securing funding and making money. However, in Gasworks' video I do think you can still be seen to reject this notion of instrumentalisation when you say that you find your work “almost needs to be secret, like a secret shame. My work thrives in that space and it is that space that I wish to explore.”<sup>[03]</sup> This reminds me of a quote about the role of the artist that is widely attributed to the poet Stéphane Mallarmé: “Everything that is sacred and that wishes to remain so must envelope itself in mystery.”

I hope I'm not reading into it too much, but I feel like my recent experience of having a baby and what I learned about the medicalisation of birthing reflects these ideas about the nature of art and the role of the artist—especially the associated idea that the process of creation is something that is best unobserved by those who are strangers or foreign to it. Birthing evolved from being considered a private or sacred kind of thing, in familiar environments like the home, with familiar people like partners and midwives that the woman knows and invites to support the process, to one that is observed, monitored, and examined instrumentally by doctors in hospitals. This has taken the power to birth more naturally away from women, and changed the meaning and experience of birth in the process. With this in mind, I was wondering if you could describe your visit to the hospital in Portsmouth while on the Gasworks residency, including how it made you feel and what gave you the idea to visit.

CP                    Wow, congratulations Jasmine! I didn't know you were a mum now. That's amazing!

I was born in Portsmouth but left before I turned one. It's always been on my mind to visit this place and to use it to make some kind of work about my identity but I felt no major sense of belonging or anything hugely revelatory when I visited. I took two trips to Portsmouth, the weather was quite bad both times. The first time, I got off the train at the harbour, which was a really long way away from the hospital. The walk took up most of the day and when I got there I just wandered around taking photos of everything, feeling a bit stressed that I had no real good reason to be there. The second time I got the train to the right station. I bought a huge tomato from a nearby shop and crushed it between my head and the wall of one of the hospital bathrooms. Somebody walked in while I was cleaning up and a security guard soon followed but, luckily, by then I had cleaned up properly. I walked around the entire hospital a few times, ran up and down the stairwell for about an hour, and then sat on a grapefruit in another bathroom. As for how it made me feel, I guess I was at a loss for what to do, how to interact with a very human but also dehumanised building. The idea that I came from there felt big in my mind but completely meaningless in

reality. It felt perverse to be there. Honestly, it felt like a kind of lonely place.

I like that quote from Mallarmé. I find that whenever I do a residency my sleeping pattern takes a dramatic turn towards nocturnal. At Headlands I was still living in New Zealand time, going to sleep almost every day after the sun had come up and waking up halfway through the afternoon, and it was similar, though less dramatic, at Gasworks. I made a series of paintings years ago and called them all *jetlag*, which I don't think I fully understood at the time. I think that when I am in an intense period of making I like to be in a similar kind of headspace. Sometimes I didn't get anything done in a day until I thought all the other residents were asleep. I became particularly obsessed with the stairs at the Headlands studio building and would run up and down them many times during my late studio nights. I took so many photos of them when it was time to leave, in an attack of sentimentality. I just don't think you can properly appreciate something like a stairwell when other people are up and walking around.

JG                    Thank you! Yes, it's been an amazing experience, especially doing a natural home birth with supportive midwives. I learned so much through that process and felt I was able to make the experience an empowering one. But it also made me aware that I was lucky to be able to access that learning and support, as it is not the experience of many women, with traumatic and unnecessary medical interventions still extremely common in the hospital system. I suppose hospitals do tend to have that clinical and institutional kind of feeling, as the presence of security personnel highlights even more.

This aspect of policing bodies and space might allow us to segue into your Headlands residency—whether that residency still allowed you to look into aspects of housing insecurity, as the statement on the website outlines. Did thinking about this while overseas allow you a bit more freedom to explore this notion?

Also, you mentioned going to death metal gigs while at Gasworks and I wondered if you found this was more generative than the



hospital visits? Although it is hard to predict how our life experiences or research might filter into creative work, I imagine the gigs might've felt much more appropriate or welcoming, while also suiting your nocturnal habits; being out and amongst the London nightlife.

CP I wrote my proposal for Headlands almost three years before I actually got there. I wrote about housing insecurity in my application because I was working on a commission at the time which asked me to respond to the concept of home, but even then, the idea wasn't really that central to the work I made, just a starting point. Making work about one specific thing just isn't how I work or think and I have chosen to communicate through art because art can communicate in a way that is not that direct or literal. The work needs to go somewhere else than my intent, it needs to live its own life away from my feelings or words. But in saying that, I think the decision to make art is always an exploration of housing insecurity on some level, especially in a residency situation, where you have a temporary home and friends and then you pack it up and go somewhere else. I find this aspect of artist residencies really difficult. I think a lot of the work I made on both residencies was essentially about anxiety or sitting still and having tons of energy. I found a process that would take as long as possible and take up as little space and got lost in it.

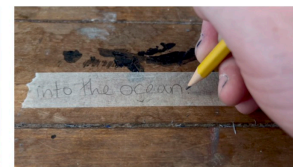
It was really refreshing to make art in a place where nobody knew anything about me. New Zealand can feel very small sometimes and I find that can be quite suffocating for art making. One of my favourite things was the presentations we all had to give about our practice—it felt liberating and very validating to have it seen through new eyes. My body is often in my work and I draw heavily from my life, but I intend that to be a body anonymous to the audience, the work is not supposed to be about me, the person, but me the object.

Death metal gigs were more welcoming than the hospital, but that was not a surprise. Metal can feel like such a culture of abundance, where everybody is getting plenty of what they want—it seems like

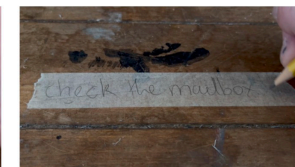
a very happy place. I went to those gigs to experience a feeling of being totally surrounded, like being lost inside a pillow, and that was exactly what it was like.



Artist rubs blue paint and wood glue on his foot to create a blue ball. Still from Campbell Patterson, *blue foot*, 2022, digital video, 12 min 43 sec, made during Patterson's Headlands residency, 2022. Courtesy of Campbell Patterson.



Moments from November 2021 written onto a piece of masking tape stuck to the floor. Still from Campbell Patterson, *nowhere 2*, 2022, digital video, 41 min 24 sec. Made during Patterson's Headlands residency, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.



Moments from November 2021 written onto a piece of masking tape stuck to the floor. Still from Campbell Patterson, *nowhere 2*, 2022, digital video, 41 min 24 sec. Made during Patterson's Headlands residency, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.



Research image taken inside Portsmouth Hospital during Patterson's Gasworks residency, 2022. Image courtesy of Campbell Patterson.



The staircase at Patterson's Headlands residency, 2022. Image courtesy of Campbell Patterson.

JG I see. Did you find that some of the anxiety you mention comes from the temporary nature of the residency experience, compounded with the housing crisis here in New Zealand and the global cost-of-living crisis? Your process of using a lot of time in a small amount of space sounds pertinent. What materials were you working with at the time and how were you using them? Also, did you document the grapefruit and tomato scenes at the hospital? And is exercise a part of your practice (like climbing the stairs)?

CP Well, when I did start working at Headlands, I started using materials that I could find around the place: a soiled blue microfibre rag (which I spent a while cleaning), wood glue from the workshop, tiny amounts of acrylic paint from one of the painters working there, and, of course, my phone. I made a video in each studio documenting the daily attempts to fit into these jeans my dad gave me, which are too small. I'm mostly completely nude in the video and I'm super self-conscious about it; I may never exhibit it. I never managed to fit into them comfortably. The jeans sat in the middle of the studio for most of both residencies, I would put them on then take them off and put them down, the video cuts to me picking them up the next day and the studio evolves in the background.

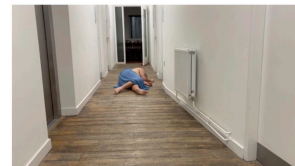
I also revisited a process that I had played with many years ago, of rubbing wood glue and paint between my hands until it hardened into a putty-like consistency which could then be used like a sort of paint. I think the desire to explore this came from the experience of breaking my right arm at the start of 2022 and the rehab processes involved in the healing. About a week before I left New Zealand, in July, I fell on that same arm and fractured my shoulder so was still in quite a bit of pain when I arrived at Headlands. It felt good to push against the resistance of the drying glue. I became interested in the parallel between physical healing and emotional healing, and wanted to explore that space.

In the paintings that I was finishing before leaving New Zealand, I was consciously trying to slow down the painting process. I thought that once overseas I would emerge from this place and increase the pace of the process but actually I ended up slowing it down even more, to the point where I started to think about it as being something my body was dissolved in. I continued to explore this process at Gasworks, but more as a process than as a means for composition. Less interested in the material being fixed in a certain way than letting it fall to the floor to be swept into the work. More and more, I felt like my project was an exploration of both sitting still and rapidly moving, not articulating but trying.

Also, while at Gasworks I made the decision to title my works *torso* if there was no other title for them. *Torso* instead of *untitled*

because, if nothing else, the works are of that part of the body, where anxiety and restlessness dwell.

I didn't document the actions at the hospital. I think of them as research, ways to interact with a building. I was interested in the futility of that interaction; that I felt very small and insignificant in relation. Exercise is a huge part of my creative process and just daily life. It helps to be moving, helps to process things and ideas, and sometimes it's just really hard to sit in front of a laptop for any length of time without wanting to get up and run away!



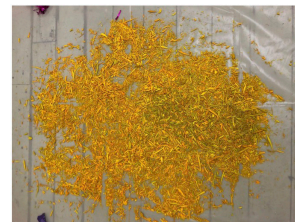
Artist lies on the floor covered by a blue airplane blanket, tries to sleep, rolls over to turn on the automatic lights whenever they turn off. Still from Campbell Patterson, *sleep*, 2022, digital video, 43 min 11 sec, made during Patterson's Gasworks residency, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.



Campbell Patterson, *torso*, 2022, acrylic, wood glue, rags. Courtesy of Campbell Patterson.



Campbell Patterson, *torso*, 2022, acrylic, wood glue, rags. Courtesy of Campbell Patterson.



Work in progress during Patterson's Gasworks residency, 2022. Image courtesy of Campbell Patterson.



Floor residue swept up before leaving Patterson's Headlands residency, 2022. Image courtesy of Campbell Patterson.



JG That's cool. I've been thinking a lot about that link between emotional and physical healing myself lately. In my doctoral research I was looking at that idea, specifically with regard to the natural environment. But the field of ecocriticism that I was specialising in can feel so heavy, righteous, and serious. This is part of the reason I wanted to talk to you about your practice, because, like I said at the start, I've always seen an element of humour in your work. I've noticed ecocriticism is finally moving towards affects like hope, joy, and laughter more than the likes of fear, guilt, anger, and grief, but it is a slow process. Maybe that is because, as Mark Fisher discusses in *Exiting the Vampire Castle*, in the arts and academia more generally there has been a focus on social justice, marginalised identities, trauma and victimhood that feels kind of oppressive at times, despite often good intentions.<sup>[04]</sup> So perhaps the idea you touch on with regards to the torso and anxiety could be extended to laughter, too?

Do you feel like humour is something that continues to be relevant to your practice—especially during the residencies and while doing absurd or futile acts like those with the grapefruit and tomato at the hospital as research, or with the videos you made with your father's jeans—maybe as a way of dealing with anxiety and uncertainty perhaps? Maybe it's because they're focused on things not fitting, like the parts of the interview footage that you felt best articulated your practice.

CP Yes! The concept of fitting/not fitting felt central to my explorations overseas. Also, you are right, the torso can definitely be extended to laughter! But I don't think about laughter when I make my work. I don't really think about humour at all but I do like to explore the absurd and the ridiculous because there is a real freedom there, and you can hide a lot. It's also liberating to move away from the rational! I am definitely interested in that too, though there needs to be a balance. I think it would be a disservice to that part of the work to consciously explore humour in any kind of laboured way. Maybe I'm too close to the work to even know what people are going to find funny. It does make me happy that people can see humour in the work. Laughter is a good response, it is a

nice thing but it can quickly be devalued in this context. I think an art gallery is a space where people really want to laugh.

### Footnotes

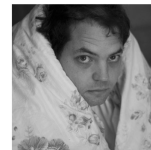
01. Details of the residencies at Headlands and Gasworks are linked here.

02. Instead, Patterson completed the Headlands residency from 19 July – 31 August 2022, and the residency at Gasworks from 3 October – 19 December 2022. Awarded by the New Zealand Friends of Gasworks, Patterson's residency at Gasworks was part of an annual residency programme co-organised by the Jan Warburton Charitable Trust and Stephanie Post in collaboration with Creative New Zealand and Elam School of Fine Arts.

03. Campbell Patterson in: Gasworks, "Artist in Residence: Campbell Patterson (New Zealand)," Vimeo, <https://vimeo.com/776247548>.

04. Mark Fisher, "Exiting the Vampire Castle," Open Democracy, 24 November 2013, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/exiting-vampire-castle/>.

### Biographies



Campbell Patterson (b.1983) creates works in an interchangeable array of mediums that evoke the mundane, repetitive, but frequently sublime aspects of everyday living and suburban experience. In his video work, Patterson often transforms his body into an absurd domestic tool, such as in the ongoing series *Lifting my mother for as long as I can* (2006–). Particularly through the use of repetition, Patterson invokes the conceptual tradition of the mid-twentieth century through figures like Stanley Broun and On Kawara—transplanted into the contexts of domestic Aotearoa environments.

Patterson graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Elam School of Fine Arts, the University of Auckland, in 2006. His work has been included in *Contact Us*, Cement Fondu, Sydney (2020); *Performance Portraits*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki (2016); *Art as a verb*, Artspace, Sydney (2015) and the 6th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2010).



Jasmine Gallagher is a stay-at-home mum from Ōtautahi Christchurch. Her debut poetry collection, *Dirge Bucolic*, centres around the nervous breakdown and recovery of a female protagonist and was published by Compound Press in 2022.

HUM

creative nz  
ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND TOI AOTEAROA

Thursday, 15 February 2018

## Emerging into the light

By Rebecca Fox

Entertainment > Arts



Campbell Patterson in the Hocken Library gallery space where his Frances Hodgkins Fellowship exhibition will hang. Photo: Gregor Richardson

**Having closeted himself away in a studio for the past year, Frances Hodgkins Fellow Campbell Patterson is emerging a little lost and contemplative, finds Rebecca Fox.**

Campbell Patterson has spent most of the past week in bed, sleeping and watching television.

It is his way of decompressing from a year of intensive creativity as the Frances Hodgkins Fellow.

"I'm going through post-residency depression, staying in bed all day.

"I'm in a very nostalgic mood, very sentimental, but I'm in a much better place with my practice."

Having worked nearly full-time at Auckland Library for nine years, the fellowship was a rare opportunity for Patterson to fully explore his practice full-time.

"It's a completely different world; before [when I did residencies] I always took leave."

He took that to heart, spending most of his time in the studio creating, even when communicating with his partner in Singapore at odd times of the day and night.



toot floor, 2017, by Campbell Patterson. Photo: The Artist and Michael Lett Gallery

"I lived quite an isolated anti-social existence."

It enabled him to produce work for three exhibitions - "Call Sick" for the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in June and another in Auckland in September and then this month's "toot floor" at the Hocken Library.

"toot floor" - its name inspired by a comment a flatmate made about his flat's toilet floor after the toilet leaked - brings together some work he did right at the start of his residency and worked on "ever so slightly" during the year, and pieces created since September.



A major focus for the University of Auckland's Elam School of Fine Arts graduate (2006) has been the writing of a book - "a description of a narrative focusing on everyday movements" - and the subsequent editing required to get it to its finished state.

He managed to edit 8000 words from the 20,000 he had written.

"It was a bit of a chiselling job. The text editing was a huge part of the daily grind."

The long-distance relationship led to him being up at night and not sleeping much.

He managed to edit 8000 words from the 20,000 he had written.

"It was a bit of a chiselling job. The text editing was a huge part of the daily grind."

The long-distance relationship led to him being up at night and not sleeping much.

"They were the darkest and deepest part of the fellowship, but I liked that I got so much done. I could do printing when I was on the phone; the laborious stuff, cutting out lino blocks."

The fellowship has influenced his work, as has how he worked for the year.

He did a lot more work on paper as he is aware that having left Auckland and his job he now has no fixed abode or job, so paper is more portable.

"I can keep it in folders. It's heartbreaking to destroy things."

This year he also worked in older mediums, such as VHS, film, photocopying and lino printing.

"It was keeping the work as simple as possible. Technology is tedious. So this year I used new mediums, ways of working."

The lino prints are "quite simple" for him to work on.

"It's an expressive medium without a lot of effort. You don't have a huge amount of control compared to a screen print."

Patterson, who was born in Portsmouth, England, says he prefers people to not know what they are looking at; instead to think about it or feel something as a result.

The centrepiece of the exhibition is videos he took while in Singapore of the sounds of air conditioning in toilets.

"I like the sound. The way one sound connects to another sound, how they relate to each other."



It required a lot of editing to remove the sounds of people in the toilets.

"There's quite a bit of work that goes into two moments of silence in a Singapore bathroom."

He also took a lot of photographs, including of the rubbish that had built up in his studio, which could make an appearance in his latest exhibition.

Only a week out from the end of the fellowship and about to start hanging his latest exhibition, Patterson says he still feels too close to the work to really get a sense of it.

"It all seems the same."

Attempting to describe its theme, he could only say he wanted to describe an atmosphere, to piece together the minuscule.

"My main inspiration was the music I was playing in my studio. It was a lot of depressing black metal. It was ambient, emotional but quite cold.

"The way I see this music is what I want to do in forming this art."

His partner moved to Dunedin in December and they plan to do farm work for a few months while he looks for other residency opportunities.

"It has been pretty full-on. I've put a lot of pressure on myself to be consistently working.

"Now I need to take some time to think about it, what I've not finished, what I've rushed. I'm looking forward to working my body a wee bit. It's liberating.

"I'm excited. I've never been on a farm before."

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# exhibitions now showing



call sick



FUTURE exhibitions



PAST exhibitions



## CAMPBELL PATTERSON

### RELATED EVENTS

### call sick

**17th Jun 2017 - 1st Oct 2017**

Some days the desire to escape is overwhelming. Swaddled in your bed sheets, all responsibilities muffled by their softness, the prospect of writing off the day is a sweet surrender.

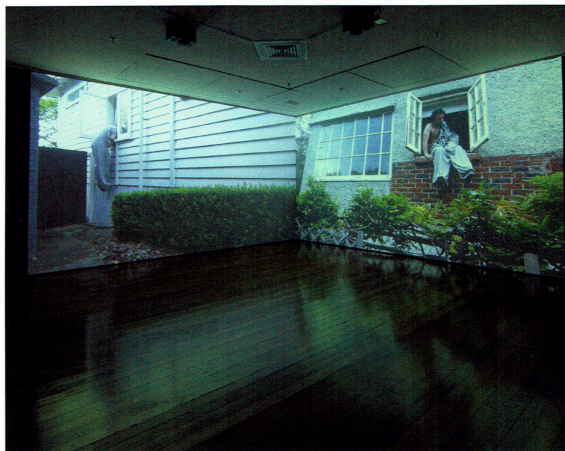
In this exhibition, Campbell Patterson wallows in this peculiar pleasure of the sick day – the kind taken when you are not actually sick. Created during the first four months of his time in Dunedin as the Frances Hodgkins Fellow, these two bodies of work both take the notion of the sick day as a starting point, variously inciting the futility of the escape and the redolence of the ensuing sleepy, stolen day.

*call sick 1, 2, 3 and 4* are hung as objects on the wall (located in the gallery space adjacent to the ground-floor lift). Cartoonishly enlarged, these four pairs of trackpants have taken on a unique patina – a veneer slowly acquired through gentle wear, having spent around 5 weeks in the artist's bed, worn as pyjamas. Saggy and pilled, the pants have been altered through wear; gradually coated in the benign detritus of a sleeping body.

Trackpants also function as a prop worn by Campbell throughout his video series *escape 1, 2, and 3*, on view in the BNZ Gallery. In this performance, the costume serves to heighten the difficulty and absurdity of each escape. Through gratuitous repetition and with unwavering solemnity, Campbell creates space for something special in the mundane – suggesting that escape or transcendence might be located somewhere between the silly and sincere.

Campbell Patterson was born in Portsmouth, England in 1983. He graduated with a BFA from University of Auckland's Elam School of Fine Arts in 2006, was awarded the Artist in Residence at McCahon House in 2015. He is the current Frances Hodgkins Fellow at the University of Otago.





### Dunedin Campbell Patterson *call sick*

Dunedin Public Art Gallery

17 June–10 October

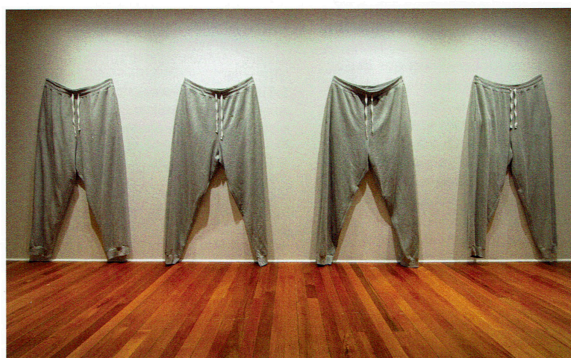
DAVID EGGLETON

Campbell Patterson's two-part installation *call sick* is a quick-witted response to his first few months as the 2017 Frances Hodgkins Fellow at the University of Otago: a physical manifestation of his apprehensiveness about the obligations and institutional weight of the legacy of the illustrious Artist Fellowship, expressed in comic form. Here once again is his representation of the persona of a neurotic artist, one possessed of an impressive collection of twitches and fancy footwork—the ducking, weaving jabs and feints of a Dadaist shadow-boxer.

Make-believe, escapism, childhood, nostalgia are what we associate with Campbell Patterson territory: his own

little corner of Absurdistan where, with exaggeration, repetition and drollery, he sets about subverting the mundane, the everyday, the boring givens of our twenty-first-century consumer-regulated existences. In this show he begins with offerings on the idea of liberty, of throwing a sickie, taking the day off, escaping responsibility.

On three enormous ceiling-to-floor video-screen projections, the artist is seen awkwardly and furtively clambering out of three different windows belonging to three different buildings, before dropping to the ground and creeping off. He is clad only in an outsize pair of trackpants that is loosely—very loosely—knotted around his waist. Each sequence is looped, and the process of appearing at the window and slithering out, sometimes with minor variations, is repeated over a period of about 15 minutes.



The illicit exit is a form of slapstick, reminiscent of early cinema's silent comedy routines, and also of scenes from the science-fiction movie *Looper*, starring Bruce Willis, which famously messes with time and space, teasing at the laws of physics. The soundtrack is ambient noise: passing traffic, birdsong, and the wind. The weather is overcast, drab. The whole supersized sketchorama, with its shrubby surrounds and suburban everywhere-ness, plays out as drab realism: this might be an absconding burglar caught on CCTV, or a lover making a hasty getaway in a saggy-baggy onesie that doesn't belong to him.

The other part of the installation consists of four pairs of outsize grey tracksuit pants, pinned up on a wall like courtroom evidence. If the videoworks capture the artist as a kind of punning Moebius the Stripper—where the 'levity' of getting away is undermined by the 'gravity' of being condemned to repeat the attempt to escape—with these four utilitarian garments we are brought back to earth, back to basics, back to a form of Duchampian checkmate.

At first glance, these billowy pants seem fit for blubbernauts, for oompa-loompas, for cartoon legends. But a wall label advises that the artist himself wore these four sets of sweatpants, each for about five weeks, between 1 February and 16 June 2017. They were worn as bedwear. They hang there, then, unwashed and slightly whiffy.

What they represent is a testament to feelings. Their sheer bigness is a mocking commentary on the artist's anxieties about the 'giants' who have preceded him in holding the Fellowship. Patterson's previous strategic uses of abjection, abasement and abandonment issues are brought to mind. Literally stained with night-sweats, these swaddles of cotton-polyester are imbued with the perspiration exuded in quest of subconscious inspiration, or else with perspiration exuded in nightmarish dread by someone who now inhabits the trackpants of champions past and is expected to step up. No wonder he has been tempted to 'call sick'.

(above & left) Campbell Patterson's *call sick*  
at Dunedin Public Art Gallery, June 2017  
(Photographs: Iain Frengley)

# ONE MORE DAY

*'Emmalee Bauer of Elkhart worked for the Sheraton Hotel company in Des Moines until she was fired for using her employer's computer to keep a journal which recorded all of her efforts to avoid work. "This typing thing seems to be doing the trick," she wrote. "It just looks like I am hard at work on something very important." And indeed she was. Her book-length work hits on something fundamental about wage labor and the spectacle, namely the separation of labor from desire. One works not because one particularly wants to, but for the wages, with which to then purchase commodities to fulfill desires'.<sup>1</sup>*

A historicised *mansplaining* haunts Patterson's performance work. Endless references to the schema of the heroic, able-bodied, upright, homo sapien are alluded to. The assured swagger of Pollock, Klein and Burden ghost him. But it is from the embodied perspective of the precariat that Patterson performs.<sup>2</sup> This precariat — in the 'overdeveloped' world anyway — is likely to be a cultural worker, civil servant or artist in residence who engages in hybrid forms of labour, within part-time, freelance, and (always) overtime work.<sup>3</sup> This precariat is the thoroughly networked and worked-through body of contemporaneity — the pulverised subject who occupies the fragmented meme-culture-quagmire of now.

The American reality TV show *Dash Dolls* chronicles the daily life of a group of young retail workers employed by the Kardashian's Hollywood fashion brand 'Dash Boutique'.<sup>4</sup> The fashion brand outlet provides a fluorescently lit backdrop for the retail workers' familial dramas, romances, interpersonal failings and career aspirations to unfold. Retail work aside, it becomes obvious that the performance of heteronormative desires encased in legibly gendered and racialised bodies is the real work of these 'dash dolls'. And it is this reality TV logic that might ghost our own worlds too, where, under the arch of brand loyalty, it is ones very own desiring production or the *performance* of ones life-world that is being subsumed under the sign of capital and integrated into a totalised market sphere. No wonder Jan Verwoert wrote that we no longer just work, we *perform*.<sup>5</sup>

After completing his three-month long residency in Titirangi at the McCahon House, Patterson began to chronicle, in writing, his life back at work at the Auckland Central Library. Scrawling handwritten notes on scraps of paper and translating them into word documents, his writing records, by the hour, details of his working life via a jumble of embodied and subjective states. Accounts of banal work tasks, emails, dealings with angry customers, jokes with staff members or being moved almost to tears by a country song, are all written in an undifferentiated pitch. Rendered in this stylistic monotone — just like being overcome by tiredness or swallowed by an opiate haze — his writing's flatness is affective. There is something molecular, something larval, bubbling away under this flat surface, shoring up a latency or potential coursing through the body of the everyday. But Patterson's writing also captures the bitter sweetness of work-life; of the everyday as both a situated and embodied site of praxis, and a space of wilting agency, as one waits and longs for the day to be over. I remember reading somewhere while working my own banal teen job at a winery that, at work, when a day seems to go so slow, life begins to seem far too short.

One thing that can be noted from reading Patterson's accounts is that the library as emblem, institution or duty bound civic entity is only the sum of its many minor and rearranging parts. Where it is really the stupid jokes, discussions of TV shows, blueberry muffins or the barely perceptible affective states coursing through a worker, that constitute the body or the whole of an institution. Similarly, the library never functions as a site of intended use alone: it is also a shelter, a meeting point, a wifi outlet, a place to sleep. It is then through its unintended uses, through dysfunctional and adaptive actions, that an institution might be shaped too.

In his writing, Patterson draws from the renewed traction that immanent, embodied and situated styles of writing are getting at present. But this interest in the diaristic also relates to his wider, ongoing body of work in which he draws and performs from the mundane space of daily life. Writing acts as a double agent within the everyday, or rather to doubly perform as a library worker and an art worker. It is through this hybrid that the precariat also emerges in Patterson's work. In this emergence, it is not so imperative to discern between where art and life might join or part, but more so to understand where certain kinds of work might end and certain kinds of life might begin.

George Watson  
November 2015



## Bios:

Campbell Patterson works and lives in New Zealand.

Born in Turanganui a Kiwi, George Watson currently lives in Auckland and is working towards a Masters at Elam School of Fine Arts.

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<sup>1</sup>Mckenzie Wark, *The Spectacle of Disintegration: Situationist Passages out of the Twentieth Century*, Verso, 2013, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>The term precariat comes from the merging of the word precarious and proletariat to describes emergent forms of labour under neoliberal capitalism where, lacking the means of production, a social class must sell their labour to live, whilst suffering from the condition of precarity through lack of job security, intermittent employment or underemployment. See: "Precariat", accessed 16 November 2015 <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precariat>>

<sup>3</sup>McKenzie Wark coins the term 'overdeveloped' world in his article for DIS. See: McKenzie Wark, "Digital Labour and the Anthropocene", in *DIS Online*, accessed 16 November 2015 <<http://dismagazine.com/disillusioned/discussion-disillusioned/70983/mckenzie-wark-digital-labor-and-the-anthropocene/>>

<sup>4</sup>*Dash Dolls* is an American reality television series that premiered on the E! cable network, on September 20, 2015. The show is a spin-off of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. The series features a group of young female employees, referred to as Dash Dolls, working in the upscale Dash boutique in Hollywood which is owned by the Kardashian family.

<sup>5</sup>Jan Verwoert, "Exhaustion & Exuberance: Ways to Defy the Pressures to Perform", A pamphlet for the exhibition *Art Sheffield 08: Yes and No and other options*, 2008.



# CURIOUS POETRY

Multidisciplinary artist Campbell Patterson's practice explores the candid quirks and painstaking obsessions of life. **Melissa Keys** talks to the artist about his recent paintings where, just like life, simple may not be quite what it seems. Portrait by **Frank Schwere**.

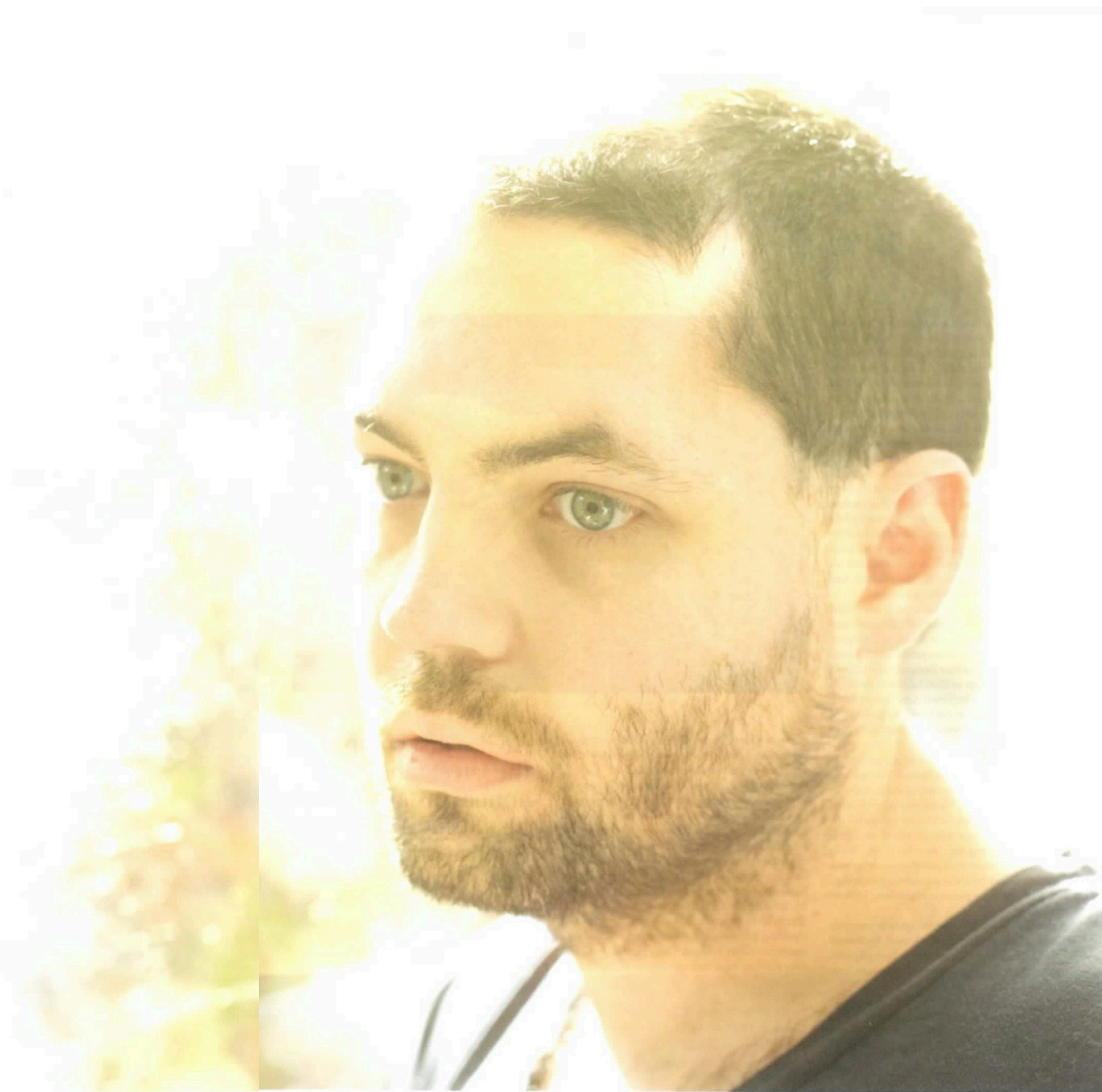
**A**wry humour and a gentle curious poetry run through **Campbell Patterson's** lo-fi and sometimes gritty work. Encompassing video performance, sculpture, painting and an artist book published by Rebecca Books, his practice utilises materials found around him and draws from what he describes as his ordinary life.

Personal significances, everyday references to family, the domestic sphere and the urban environment populate his work. His approach is at once improvised and candid yet, paradoxically obsessive and painstaking. Patterson's multidisciplinary practice often brings together what could be considered unlikely combinations of media and form such as realist paintings and performance video.

Patterson nominates music with its structures, systems and rules as a major influence on his approach to the action of making art. To date his studio playlist comprises more than 4,000 tracks as various as black metal and country genres. The range of artists and art forms that have influenced him or that he makes reference to in his work are equally diverse, spanning **Martin Kippenberger**, **Robert Bresson** (especially the later colour films), **Sean Landers**, **Dennis Cooper**, writer **Raymond Carver** and an array of drone musicians, among many others.

Graduating from the Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland in 2006, Patterson has since actively exhibited across New Zealand in **Michael Lett's** high-profile dealer gallery, artist run initiatives, public art spaces and galleries. His projects include the *Lost and Found Video Programme* at the Wellington City Gallery (2007), *Kind of Blue* (2009) at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery and *Ambient 3* (2009) in the Newcall Gallery in Auckland.

One video made during this period titled *Chip Mountain* (2009) consists of a single ill-framed



static shot of the artist in a Burger King fast food joint chewing on french fries and crudely using his hands to assemble a sculptural form from the masticated pulp. The slightly grotesque, absurd form incrementally emerges in the bottom of the frame as he builds it up with mouthfuls of material, only for it to occasionally slump or collapse out of sight again before the artist re-moulds and restores its stature.

In 2010 Patterson's profile expanded into Australia through invitations to participate in a series of major exhibitions and projects, including in the Queensland Gallery of Art / Gallery of Modern Art's critically acclaimed *Unnerved*, *The New Zealand Project*, which was also shown at the National Gallery of Victoria. Patterson also participated in the 2010 Melbourne Art Fair as part of a group exhibition presented by the not-for-profit Artspace NZ and his practice was represented in the influential 6th Asia Pacific Triennial at QAGOMA in Brisbane.

In 2011 Patterson's work featured in *Reason and Rhyme* at Gertrude Contemporary in Melbourne and then at St Paul Street Gallery at Auckland University of Technology. Other important exhibitions followed in 2012 and 2013 across New Zealand, Australia and United Kingdom, such as *There's a Hole in the Sky* in outer Sydney's Campbelltown Arts Centre; *Made Active: The Chartwell Show*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki; and *Nestbeschermutzer* at Southard Reid Gallery in London.

Currently nearing the end of a prestigious residency at the McCahon House, Patterson is making new work for upcoming exhibitions at Michael Lett and Te Uru Waitakere Gallery located nearby in west Auckland. He has just completed the latest (and 10th) annual installment of his *Lifting My Mother For As Long As I Can* video series. While focusing for the moment on painting and other two-dimensional work he is also considering showing a number of new video pieces in his coming Michael Lett show.

Patterson describes the paintings he is presently making as "monochromes with bones". Each work is assembled slowly, with layer after layer of paint. After each layer is applied, Patterson allows an hour to elapse before applying the next and leaves a line of the previous colour to show through. When he paints each successive new layer, he paints around the lines from the previous one and through this accretive process the earliest layers become the deepest lines



in the surface of the work. This laborious process is a counterpoint to the apparent simplicity of his approach to video and performance.

Continuing his interest in absurd and humorous situations, seemingly pointless challenges and peculiar scenarios, Patterson has also recently been transcribing the contents of team meetings he attends in his role working in a public library. These meticulous records promise to become the basis for a new piece that will likely register the awkward bureaucratic dynamics and theatre of workplace relations and social interaction.

Patterson's practice explores the vagaries and repetitive patterns of contemporary life through micro-moments of theatre. His playful, fond and critical pieces inhabit the territories of the familiar and alienating.

» NEW WORK BY CAMPBELL PATTERSON EXHIBITS AT MICHEL LETT GALLERY IN AUCKLAND FROM 26 AUGUST TO 26 SEPTEMBER 2015.

He has just completed the latest (and 10th) annual installment of his *Lifting My Mother For As Long As I Can* video series.



1. // Campbell Patterson, *Lifting My Mother For As Long As I Can*, 2015. Digital video on DVD, edition of 3, 3 min 41 sec.

2. // Campbell Patterson, *Last Painting #4*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 45 x 60cm.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MICHAEL LETT, AUCKLAND



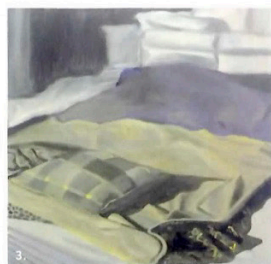
3. // Campbell Patterson, *Don't Come*, 2013. Oil on canvas, 50 x 50cm.

4. // Campbell Patterson, *Last Painting #3*, 2015. Oil on canvas, 75 x 60cm.

5. // Campbell Patterson, *The Guest Room*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 30 x 40cm.

6. // Campbell Patterson, *Box*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 30 x 40cm.

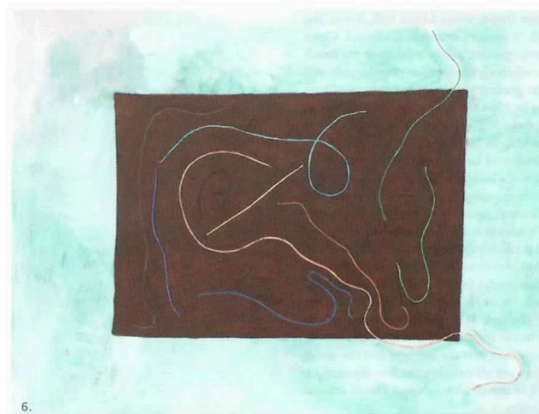
COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND MICHAEL LETT, AUCKLAND



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**ANDREW THOMAS**  
Co-director, Michael Lett

"Campbell Patterson's practice comes from a place of integrity. He really lives the work and that gives it a certain perspective that makes it really interesting. There is an underlying sense of humour, which makes it easy to connect with on an emotional level. Those things aside, Campbell is very smart and the work reflects that too. His work is collected by those who wish to enrich their lives by living with something extraordinary."

"Campbell's exhibiting career and collector base has grown steadily since we first presented his work at the gallery seven years ago. In this time he has been included in several museum exhibitions in both New Zealand and Australia, has been regularly collected by institutions in both countries, and has been included in a group exhibition at a commercial gallery in London."

"The presentation at QAGOMA for 6th Asia Pacific Triennial in 2010 was a moment when people really started to take notice of the work. Several of the films included in that exhibition were acquired for the collection and it resulted in invitations to participate in other exhibitions. Campbell is currently the artist in residence at McCahon House in West Auckland. The work he is making is fantastic and I think the dedicated studio time that the residency has afforded has allowed for some great momentum in the work and this could be another defining moment."

Melissa Keys

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Campbell Patterson's work examines a domesticity that eludes the easy intimacy such signifiers typically inhabit. Instead, over the course of a practice that has at various times consisted of painting, sculpture, video and performance, Patterson has developed a rigorous formal language of homeliness that blurs the line between familiarity and alienation.

Take, for example, his series of works made using deconstructed muesli bars, the pieces of which are meticulously arranged on a usually carpeted surface and photographed before being tidied away. Their composition ranges from blandly systematic to willfully random, all the while undergirded by the familiar patterns of household carpet. Executed in a range of mostly domestic settings, such as friends' flats and his grandparents' bach, Patterson selects the location based on the formal qualities of the carpet and lighting. Nonetheless, there is a strongly affective dimension to the finished result. The sticky materiality of the sugar-encrusted oats, bits of fruit and seeds, which is evident in the photographs, is enough to conjure up memories of school lunches, long car rides, tramping trips and the like. Even the act itself, of crumbling up a muesli bar into its constituent parts and arranging these in patterns on the floor, is deeply suggestive of boredom, futility and a softly destructive impulse.

An obsessional quality was also further brought out in two 2014 exhibitions for which Patterson produced larger scale sculptural versions of his muesli bar works. At Dog Park Art Project Space, Christchurch, in an exhibition titled *The network was desperate for new hits*, Patterson showed *Carpet* (2014), a large floor 'painting' in which the deconstructed pieces of muesli bars formed elaborate patterns loosely inspired by the designs on toilet paper. For his solo exhibition *Watching* at Auckland's Fuzzy Vibes later that same year, Patterson produced four more large scale muesli bar pieces. This time titled after couches (i.e. *sadness couch*, *youth couch*), the dimensions of these works correspond to those of actual couches that have been owned by the artist or his family. The works from both exhibitions attest to a painstaking, highly embodied process – one can only imagine the planning required to ensure that one has the correct balance of different coloured muesli bar bits, not to mention the hours the artist must have spent on his knees assembling the things. In this light they begin to look slightly abject and speak more to a compulsive, zoned out and mechanical process than to their domestic origins. For all these works' affective heaviness (one of the materials listed in *sadness couch* is 'tears'), domesticity is deployed as something like a formal trope in which the meaning and significance of the artist's references are largely obscured or overridden – a process of abstraction in which the familiar is rendered desultory.

Patterson's muesli bar works form one half of his recent artist book *campbellfrieda*, a collaboration of sorts with his parents' dog Frieda. Arranged so that the muesli bar images alternate with mauled images of soft toys, the book's two elements share a process based on a kind of compulsive repetition. With dozens of images of deconstructed muesli bars on carpet and soft toys with their faces ripped off in a nearly identical manner, both images sets also have in common a sense of 'soft violence'. Alluding to violence and mutilation, the toys are nonetheless only toys, ripped apart by an innocent domestic pet; and similarly, the act of picking apart a muesli bar suggests idle play or perhaps frustration, a banal violence free of meaning or consequence.

This mirrors the neurotic and repetitive processes that inform Patterson's work across all mediums. A recent series of paintings, entitled 'Last Paintings,' addresses this repetition with a droll sense of futility. The title alludes to Richard Strauss' *Four Last Songs*, but for Patterson it becomes a joke about his inability to quit painting, the futility of naming something as the last of anything, and perhaps the futility of trying to quit at all. The pieces themselves, which were begun during the artist's McCahon House residency in 2015, feature multiple, thick layers of paint with strings of thread embedded into its different layers. The effect is a heightened sense of depth, drawing the viewer's attention to the laborious application of paint that went into each work.

The materiality of the work thus becomes a point of relatability – one senses not just the physical effort of applying layers of paint, but a methodology and a way of working. As with the muesli bar works, this tangible sense of process generates an affect of an at once laborious and playful repetitiveness. Moreover, there is a mechanical and somehow generic aspect to this production, in which form and method seem constantly to override the work's personal and domestic significance. This tension is embodied most clearly in the muesli bar works, in which the warmth and familiarity connoted by the carpet patterns is offset, on the one hand, by their ubiquity, and on the other by their prioritization as purely formal devices onto which the muesli parts are distributed.

In some ways, the tortuous studies of repetition explored by Patterson are the opposite of what Josef Strau has termed the "non-productive attitude." Referring to his Cologne milieu of the '90s, Strau describes "a kind of transformed fetishism attitude to live the social life of an artist without actually producing any art, or at least without presenting any art."<sup>1</sup> Patterson's practice, on the other hand, eschews the social life of the artist entirely and instead aims towards production for production's sake, evacuated of meaning. And yet the spectre of autobiography remains inescapable for any consideration of his work – after all, this is the same artist who is probably most well-known for the performance piece *Lifting my Mother for as Long as I Can* (2006-ongoing). Yet these autobiographical elements, traces of the artist's social world found in elements of his work such as using his parents' dog, is alluded to and then promptly repressed, buried by the formal repetition that sustains the work.

Perhaps what his work expresses is closer to what critic Pablo Larios last year described as "network fatigue." Citing current conditions of image over-saturation, Larios argues for the possibility of "a resistant ephemerality that claims the personal against swarming circulation."<sup>2</sup> Patterson's work suggests that one way to resist the numbing bombardment of constant novelty might be to simply give up and stick with what is closest to home.

-Tim Gentles

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<sup>1</sup> Josef Strau, "The Non-Productive Attitude," in *Make Your Own Life: Artists in and Out of Cologne* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2007), 28.

<sup>2</sup> <http://frieze-magazin.de/archiv/features/network-fatigue/?lang=en>



# WATCHING CAMPBELL PATTERSON FOR 12 MINUTES AND 38 SECONDS

Jim Barr and Mary Barr

We first saw Campbell Patterson's work at his final art school submission at Elam. On the floor, at the back of a darkened room, a row of TV sets were showing, as we later discovered, all the outtakes from the many videos he had made while studying. Once we turned on the lights, we found Patterson had also assembled in piles around the base of the walls "everything I could find that had anything to do with what I had done at art school." It included, stacks of books, drawings, videotapes and DVDs, magazines and art equipment. Above these piles were pinned pages from a notebook on which were carefully listed every item in the room. Patterson later remarked that this approach had something to do with his simple enjoyment of stuff in piles. "I like piles. When I do lots of shopping I like to put everything into a pile to see how big it is. We make piles all the time in life. A diary is a kind of pile. Living is building."

Umberto Eco suggests that we like lists (and piles) because we don't want to die. That out of the chaos of life we want to wrestle some kind of order and meaning, and a list offers a clear structure to help us do it. In this early presentation at art school, Patterson actualised that search for meaning by making the abstraction of thinking and learning real. An odd effect of the installation was its ability to be both overwhelming in detail and reassuring in structure at the same time. By following a simple set of self-imposed rules, this student in his final year had attempted to make sense, quite literally, of his entire art school education. In the years since, Patterson has come up with other ways to deal with the weight of real life through rituals and tests, trials and rites of passage, and usually with a simplicity of structure so that one thing seamlessly leads to another. There is something of Andy Warhol's simple fascination with repetition in his video work, maybe rubbing shoulders with John Bock's wilder obsession with serial performance.



*Lifting my Mother for as Long as I Can*, 2006 (1:47 minutes)

Campbell Patterson is usually the star of his own show, but it appears to be a role that comes out of practicalities rather than on figuring out the complexities of his own identity. When planning how to execute the idea that turned out to be his first video piece *Soap Pushups*, Patterson first considered making the work by balancing two heavy planks of wood on two bars of soap. The slithering plinths, however, proved more unstable than expected so Patterson "tried doing it myself, put the camera on the ground and filmed it." In that simple sentence are the operating instructions for his recent work as he ranges around his local environment recording himself sleeping, sneezing, chewing, crawling and clambering, in bathrooms, bedrooms, garages and out and about in the neighbourhood.

Watching Patterson on screen can be unsettling. Often he is undertaking simple tasks – removing his clothes and stuffing them item by item into a public rubbish bin, emptying and refilling a dumpster, dragging a live video camera behind him, attempting to free himself from a self-imposed imprisonment in a folding bed, easing himself back and forth over his sleeping partner, circumnavigating a confined space without touching the floor – but the defiant pointlessness of the appointed tasks often seems out of synch with Patterson's gritty determination to accomplish them. His actions segue into ritual through repetition and an inner logic that is not easy to fathom.

Patterson likes to think of the more than 70 videos he has made so far as a single project, and indeed showed many of them together at the City Gallery Wellington in 2009 thus stressing this very point. For the viewer they can certainly feel like modules, items on some list we can't read. We are not so much part of the audience for a performance as witnesses (or even voyeurs) to what appear to be strangely intimate activities. Not that Patterson is shy about acknowledging the camera and, by implication, us as his audience. Neither is he self-conscious about adapting his physical performances during the recording to fit within the camera's frame. As to the visual quality, it owes more to the low-tech contingency of CTV than conventional filmmaking.

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Campbell Patterson made the first version of holding up his mother (*Lifting my Mother for as Long as I Can*) in 2006, his final year at art school. He has repeated the performance every year since and the final number of performances is so far open-ended.

"I was thinking of a video of lifting something. I had plans for lifting other things and other ways of lifting them. I decided the ultimate object was Mum. It's changed lots because we have changed lots, but it is still really just the same as always. I think the work changes with the different versions and I like that there is a narrative between them even though I have never seen them all playing together."

Lifting my Mother for as Long as I Can, 2006  
(1:47 minutes)

Let's get the obvious question out of the way first. How long can Campbell Patterson hold his mother in his arms before his strength runs out? In this first attempt it is one minute and 39 seconds. Essentially the scenario goes like this: Patterson's mother stands in front of a floral curtain in what seems to be a living room. She appears self-conscious and uncertain. Patterson comes into frame from behind the camera, steps behind her, bends and lifts her off the ground. Without help he holds her up for as long as he is physically able, and when he reaches his limit, he lowers her to the ground, steps toward the camera and turns it off. For much of the time Patterson's mother is being held up she faces away from the camera but we can see she often can't help laughing at the absurdity of it all (trying to make light of her situation?). As his mother tries hard to control her response even Patterson can't help but smile. Mother to son, it's infectious.

Lifting my Mother for as Long as I Can, 2007  
(2:34 minutes)

The image of Patterson holding up his mother immediately suggests that most famous of mother/son works, Michelangelo's *Pietà* in Rome. There we see the mourning mother holding her dead son in her arms, her body resigned to his dead weight. The Patterson work reverses these roles turning its mood from an expression of deep public mourning of a parent for a child to something altogether more ambiguous about the dynamics of living. It asks how an adult son might relate to the woman who is his mother, and she to him. Try putting the search term 'son holding up his mother' into Google Images and see what you get; thousands of images of mothers holding up their (usually baby) sons. It's a tough mould to break.

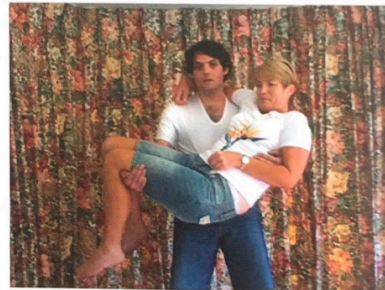
Against every maternal convention, Patterson's mother is not lifting a finger to help her son in his self-appointed trial of strength. Like Jesus in the *Pietà*, she is dead weight. Her only job is to hang around until he gives up and, particularly in the earlier versions, you have the feeling she'd rather that were sooner than later. The tableau also poses the question, if a mother is neither your carer nor supporter, what role does she play in your life? There is nothing simple about Patterson's simple reversal.



*Lifting my Mother for as Long as I Can, 2007* (2:34 minutes)



*Lifting my Mother for as Long as I Can, 2008* (1:48 minutes)



*Lifting my Mother for as Long as I Can, 2009* (3:18 minutes)

Lifting my Mother for as Long as I Can 2008 (1:48 minutes)

The act of lifting his mother always takes place in front of the same floral curtain that, we assume, hangs in the Patterson family home. Its dated style evokes nostalgia for the past when our parents (particularly our mothers) decided what home looked and felt like. This clearly is her territory, a mother's territory, where irony is banished and comfort rules. Despite their homeliness, Patterson's use of the curtains to back up a performance irresistibly transforms them into a stage curtain and the space in front into that stage's apron (another word that speaks to the domestic). While theatre curtains were always made of dignified blue or black or scarlet, Patterson's floral pattern conjures up a world of suburban backyards, flower beds and fences.

Working in front of the curtains goes way back into theatrical history. Usually the job was given to solo performers – comics, jugglers, magicians, soliloquists, singers and, who can resist it, strong men. As they worked the audience, these specialty acts also diverted attention from the grunts and thumps as the scenery was put in place for the next big act.

And, having slipped the strong man image into this story, let's consider exactly what it means to hold dead weight off the ground for as long as you can. The cradling position Patterson has chosen is not an easy one and while it is ideal for the drama of carrying a bride over the threshold, professional rescuers in fact throw people over their shoulders as soon as possible. Except for firemen. They have abandoned the iconic Fireman's Lift and now drag their subjects to safety. Somehow 'Dragging my mother for as far as I can' lacks dignity.

Patterson's work turns on a simple physical fact like all trials of endurance: he cannot hold his mother up forever. No one could. It is not simply the lift and the hold that matter here; it is the moment he fails to do either.

Lifting my Mother for as Long as I Can, 2009 (3:18 minutes)

Campbell Patterson has a studio but that is not where he chooses to make his videos. "I work everywhere. I find new places inspiring and many times the idea for where the work will be comes before what the work will be. I like bathrooms especially. You can just lock the door and do anything. Bathrooms are always the same but slightly different. They come with their own variations but with the same problems and possibilities. It doesn't really make sense to make videos in a studio." Set as it is in a domestic space, *Lifting my Mother* is typical of many Patterson videos. There is little or no set-up beyond perhaps drawing the curtains.

The idea of the studio has undergone some radical changes over the last hundred or so years. In Courbet's famous studio painting *An Allegory of the Last Seven Years of My Life*, the studio is presented as a creative hub with the artist surrounded by his patrons, friends and art's allegories, a world away from the solitary investigations of a contemporary artist like Bruce Nauman. His mapping of his empty studio by videoing it night after night sets out to capture what Nauman has described as, "...a long slice of time, just time in the studio." Campbell Patterson can work anywhere because he can project his studio as a state of mind not a state of place, a verb rather than a noun.



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*Lifting my Mother for as Long as I Can*, 2010  
(2:56 minutes)

So is *Lifting my Mother for as Long as I Can* a portrait of Campbell Patterson with his mother? In the five versions already completed there is a certain fascination in watching Patterson mature physically and his relationship with his mother seeming to shift as he grows more confident and assertive. It is the same intrigue that holds you to Nicholas Nixon’s annual portrait photographs of his wife and her three sisters.<sup>1</sup> In 2010 he photographed the same grouping for the thirty-sixth time.

While it is certainly difficult not to read the accumulating hours of video featuring Patterson carrying out his appointed task as biographical in some sense, it’s tough to work out what all those seemingly straightforward actions add up to. It is certainly not a deeper sense of the individual self. He mixes the risk of social embarrassment, the humiliation of exposure, the grind of repetition, but seems to take an anthropological perspective rather than one of personal revelation. Is it possible that Patterson is a member of a so far undiscovered tribe whose rites of passage require initiates to strip off their clothes in a public place and trash them?

When shown in art museums the inevitable lean toward narrative has a somewhat subversive effect, particularly if you subscribe to Brian O’Doherty’s view that, “One of the primary tasks of the gallery is to separate the artist from the work.” The effect of watching Patterson absorbed in his curious world changes dramatically when you watch these videos in a public setting. There is something about a public performance, even one mediated through the screen, that brings the vulnerability of exposure to the social surface.

At the time this is being written, Patterson hasn’t seen all five versions of *Lifting my Mother for as Long as I Can* shown together and when he does, it is possible he might find its accumulating history gets in the way of the act itself. Certainly there are significant differences in each performance, and it is hard to imagine them not being read as a narrative with the passing of time. Whether this narrative will inhibit or enhance the individual performances is something for the future.

*Lifting my Mother for as Long as I Can*, 2011

As we write, the sixth version of *Lifting my Mother* has yet to be made.



*Lifting my Mother for as Long as I Can*, 2010 (2:56 minutes)

1. Nicholas Nixon, *The Brown Sisters* (1999).