

Stella Corkery

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Stella Corkery
Paradises
Installation view
Michael Lett
June 2020



Stella Corkery
War Horse
2020
oil, acrylic, and gesso on canvas
1000 x 750mm
SC5987



Stella Corkery
you had fun experience
Installation view
George Fraser Gallery
July 2019



Stella Corkery
The Farm (detail)
2017

spray paint, grass, and puff stickers on foam board
760 x 510mm



Stella Corkery
Pry the Willow Open
Installation view
Michael Lett
November 2018



Stella Corkery
Theme for a Science Fiction Vampire
Installation view
Michael Lett
September 2017



Stella Corkery
Theme for a Science Fiction Vampire (detail)
2017
spray paint, oil paint, oil pastel, tea, varnish and collage elements on canvas
1300 x 7500mm
SC5014



Jim Allen, Dan Arps, Stella Corkery
Installation view
Michael Lett
August 2016



Stella Corkery
Flies
2016
spray paint and oil on canvas
914 x 609mm



Stella Corkery
Fly and Swat
2016
spray paint and oil on canvas
914 x 609mm



Stella Corkery
Necessary Distraction
Installation view
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
November 2015



Stella Corkery
I've Seen Sunny Days
Installation view
Goya Curtain, Tokyo
June 2018



Stella Corkery
Talk to the Tree
2017
oil paint on velvet
450 x 360mm



Stella Corkery
Angel's Trumpet
2017
oil on red velvet
450 x 350mm



A tall, intricate structure made of woven bamboo or rattan, resembling a chair or a decorative sculpture, with a small red ribbon tied to its top.



A small potted tree in a yellow and white striped pot, next to a dark purple duffel bag.

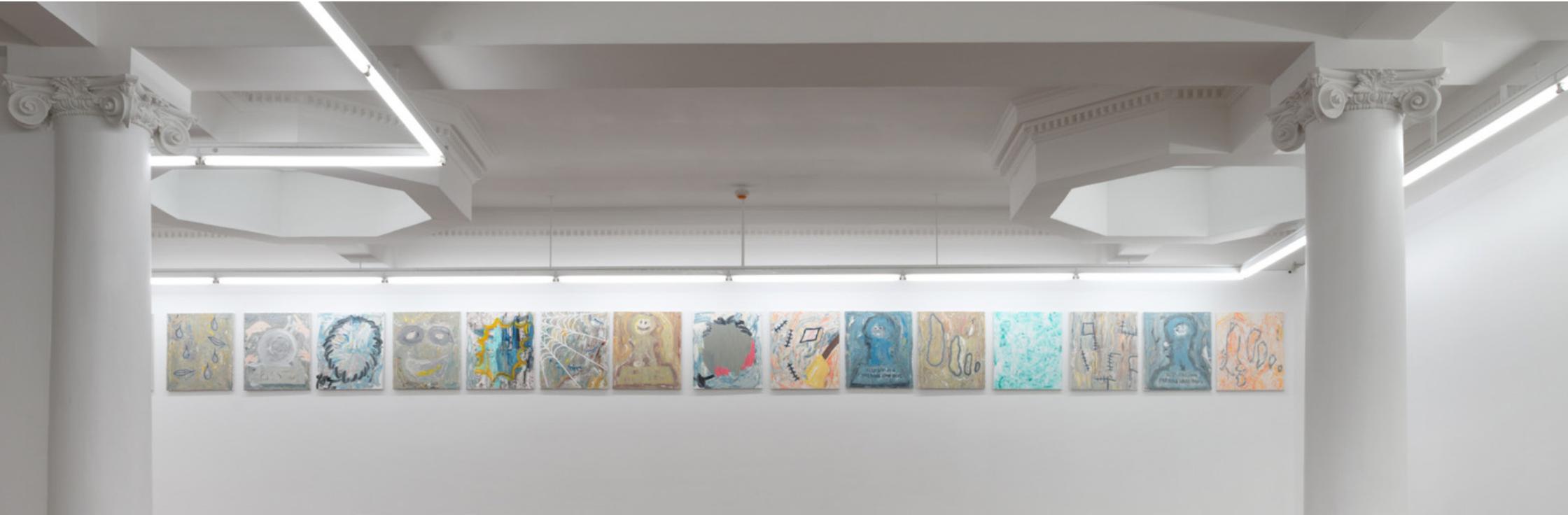
Stella Corkery
Sparks
Installation view
Michael Lett
June 2015



Stella Corkery
Sparks
Installation view
Michael Lett
June 2015



Stella Corkery
Pool (uprising)
2016
concrete garden ornament, Kikuyu Grass
dimensions variable



Stella Corkery, Dan Arps, Julian Dashper,
Jacqueline Fraser, Glen Otto and Michael Stevenson
Kicking Against the Pricks
Installation view
Michael Lett
September 2014



Stella Corkery
Lashes for Bats
2014
oil on canvas
600 x 500mm

JULIAN AND JOSIE ROBERTSON GRANT



Stella Corkery
Freedom Farmers
Installation view
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki
October 2013

Stella Corkery

Born 1960 in Tuatapere, New Zealand
Lives and works in Auckland, New Zealand

EDUCATION

2013
Masters of Fine Arts, First Class Honors, Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, New Zealand

2012
BFA (Hons) First Class Honors, Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, New Zealand

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2024
The Anticipation of Joy, Michael Lett, Auckland (group)
When E Met C, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)

2022
wiggling together, falling apart, Michael Lett, Auckland (group)

2020
Paradises, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)
Year of the Head, Olga, Dunedin (solo)

2019
Ice Cream Salad, Melanie Roger Gallery, Auckland (group)
A Short Run: A Selection of New Zealand Lathe Cut Records, Objectspace, Auckland (group)
You Had Fun Experience, George Fraser Gallery, Auckland (group)
Spring 1883, Sumer Gallery, Sydney (group)

2018
Pry the Willow Open, Michael Lett, Auckland (duo)
I've Seen Sunny Days, Goya Curtain, Tokyo (solo)
Ghost Wall, Station, Melbourne (solo)
Smoke Screens, LON Gallery, Melbourne (group)
Spring 1883, Station Gallery, Sydney (group)

2017
Theme for a Science Fiction Vampire, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)
No Direction Home, TCB art inc, Melbourne (solo)
Kubismus, Space Gallery, Napier New Zealand (group)
Pack Lite, 3 hours in Auckland, LA and New York, curated by Stella Corkery (group)

2016
Patches, Bug Gallery, Brooklyn (solo)
Keep Smiling the Boss Loves Idiots, Poppy's Gallery, New York (solo)
Jim Allen, Dan Arps, Stella Corkery, Michael Lett, Auckland (group)

2015
Necessary Distraction: A painting show, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland (group)
Sparks, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)
First Contact, North Porjects, Christchurch (group)
The False Demographic, Blue Oyster Art Project Space, Dunedin (group)
Spring 1883, Michael Lett Gallery, Sydney, Australia (group)

2014
Caravan, Station Gallery, Melbourne (solo)
Aspiration Surface, 30 Upstairs, Wellington (solo)
Kicking Against The Pricks, Michael Lett, Auckland (group)
Underfloor Heating, Gloria Knight, Auckland (duo)
9 Painting Presentation: Incidents Above a Bar, The Alderman, Melbourne (group)

2013
Freedom Farmers: New Zealand Artists Growing Ideas, Auckland Art Gallery (group)
Porous Moonlight, Papakura Art Gallery, Auckland (group)
Episodic Nomadic, Gloria Knight, Auckland (solo)
Occupy, Elam School of Fine Arts Graduate Show, MFA, Auckland (group)

2012
Way To Be Silver, Audio Foundation Gallery, Auckland (solo)
A Rush of Blood to the Head, Elam Graduate Show, Auckland (solo)
Soft Group, George Fraser Gallery, Auckland (group)

2011
Aural Emporium, sound installation, Audio Foundation, Auckland

2008

Lux Lucis Ut Sanus, video and sound installation, The Auckland Film Archive with the Audio Foundation, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand (group)

2006

Mother Dust, sound and installation, Artspace, Auckland (solo)

2004

Departments, Cuckooborough, Rm103 Auckland (group)

2003

"no direct line from my brain to my heart", Cuckoo/The Physics Room, Christchurch (group)

1997

Rock in a hard place, revolution in a shy place, Fiat Lux, Auckland (duo)
Group show, Fiat Lux, Auckland, New Zealand

1995

Please Give Generously, Teststrip Karagahape Road, Auckland (group)
Untitled, Teststrip Karagahape Road, Auckland (duo)

1993

Thriller, Teststrip Vulcan Lane, Auckland (group)
Suffer, Teststrip Vulcan Lane, Auckland (group)
1 Hour, Teststrip Vulcan Lane, Auckland (group)

BOOKS AND CATALOGUES

2017

See You There, artist photo zine, Pink Air.

2016

Blue Oyster Annual 2015, Blue Oyster Art Project Space pp. 53, 82
Looking At Painting, Volume 2, Jessie Churchill, Leeds, pp. 143-148
Teststrip: A history of an artist-run space (1992-1997)
Necessary Distraction: A Painting Show, Auckland Art Gallery pp. 113-121
Three Words: An anthology of Aotearoa/NZ Woman's Comics, pp. 144-147

2014

Elam 2013 Graduate Work, Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, 2013, p. 35

2013

Elam 2012 Graduate Work, Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, 2013, pp. 67, 98-100
Freedom Farmers: New Zealand artists growing ideas, Auckland Art Gallery p. 11
Soft Group, George Fraser Gallery, self-published artist, Auckland
010913 Stella Corkery, DDMMYY

2012

Erewhon Calling: Experimental Sound in New Zealand, The Audio Foundation and CMR, Auckland, pp. 38-39

2004

Cuckoo: A documentation of projects 01/2001-06/2003, The Physics Room p. 25

1994

Daughters of Slaughter: Adult Comic, self-published female anthology comic, curated by Stella Corkery

ARTIST PAGES

2016

anti-heroine - Hapori vol.3 , Anna Rankin, Haprori Project, Auckland, pp. 13, 23, 33, 37

2015

Soft, Le Roy #3, DDMMYY/Le Roy, 2015, pp. 1-8

2014

ISON: Façade, Bryn Roberts and ISON, 2014, pp. 20-25

2002

My Blues Song, Kate Newby, (pub.) Kate Newby, pp. 63-67

PUBLISHED WRITING

2014

Elam 2012 Graduate Work, Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, 2013 pp. 98-100

Stella Corkery's practice is determined by an exploration of painterly mark-making, reflecting and refracting the codes that characterise history's now well-known painting movements. In our time, such styles find themselves awkwardly appropriated in the gestures of readily available painting apps for smartphones, mistaking the materiality of paint with pixels, brush presets and 'adjustment layers'.

Painting software performs an intervention in which brushwork is reconfigured within the interface, emerging in digital paintings that absorb the whole history and collective memory of painting. This new techno-image flattens and explicitly painted tropes, stripping them of their subjectivities and historical character and replacing them with a repertoire of endlessly repeatable, digitally rendered brushstrokes. Corkery's practice recombines within the twin vocabularies of physical painting and virtual painting, and tests the new, uneasy starting points mediated by painting's technological dispersion. Her canvases bear the rematerialisation of digital gestures, asking us how painting might be understood after the advent of the screen.

Michael Sanchez has written of the way that in the context of screen-based image consumption, an all-over method of mark-making induces an 'artefact' in the eyes of the viewer that is optimal among the busy feeds of images encountered through a smartphone screen. Aligned with the expectation of transaction through a link format, Corkery's prodigious output registers the temporality of the infinite scroll. The sheer quantity of Corkery's oeuvre suggests a sort of disposability native to the perpetual reversion and impermanence of image aggregators, where her paintings will no doubt be shared, documented in iPhone shots by visitors to the Gallery.

Further, by installing the paintings according to a grid template – familiar to image sharing sites such as Tumblr – Corkery considers how the pervasive logic and constraints of standardised, screen-based presentation might be translated or imported into the physical gallery space. The all-over display of paintings which fills the length of the gallery wall negates the specificity of a placement; instead creating a field of noise, of patterns and textures that merge only to slip away again.

Corkery's methodology improvises with painted codes. Like a set of limited materials that can be repeated, modified, juxtaposed or transformed in any and every way. In doing so, Corkery explores dissonance and reproduction in relation to the painted mark – marks that are always borrowed from elsewhere, reprised in a feedback loop endlessly repositioning and playing itself out, inquiring into the very identity of painting in 2013.

Nery Sobasa, Co-director of Elora Night and Curator at White Gallery, The University of Auckland.



Stella Corkery, Five Minutes All Complaints – The Benefits of Painting 2013. Courtesy of the artist. Photograph by Jennifer French.

STELLA CORKERY

Why pay attention?

Stella Corkery is part of a new generation of New Zealand painters whose confident and imaginative engagement with the medium is not weighed down by the hefty baggage of its history. Her works prove that the traditional paint-on-canvas approach is critically relevant to the flux of imagery that is a prodigious feature of our digital lives. Corkery finished a master of fine arts at Elam in 2013 and was subsequently featured in the Auckland Art Gallery's notable exhibition, *Freedom Farmers: New Zealand Artists Growing Ideas*. This will be her first show with the Auckland gallerist **Michael Lett**.

What does she do?

Corkery makes unabashedly expressive works that explore painting's material appeal. The combination of traditional oil and not-so-traditional materials such as spray paint and more recently dried kikuyu grasses create intriguing formal tensions within her paintings.

What's going on?

She likens her painting practice to recycling in the revolutionary sense – an aesthetic tool for reconsidering the ordinary stuff that surrounds us. While they make reference both to art history and the proliferation of virtual imagery on the Internet, Corkery's paintings also remind us of the political potency of physical materials, objects and generous smears of paint.

The artist says...

"Objects work like compressed ideas – thinking pieces. Kikuyu grass is pulled from the garden. It is quietly invasive, flammable, but useful to hold down the sand on beachfront properties ... it won't blow away in the wind."

You can see it at...

Corkery will show at Michael Lett in Auckland from 24 June to 25 July 2015.

Kate BrettKelly-Chalmers



1.



2.

www.artcollector.net.au



3.

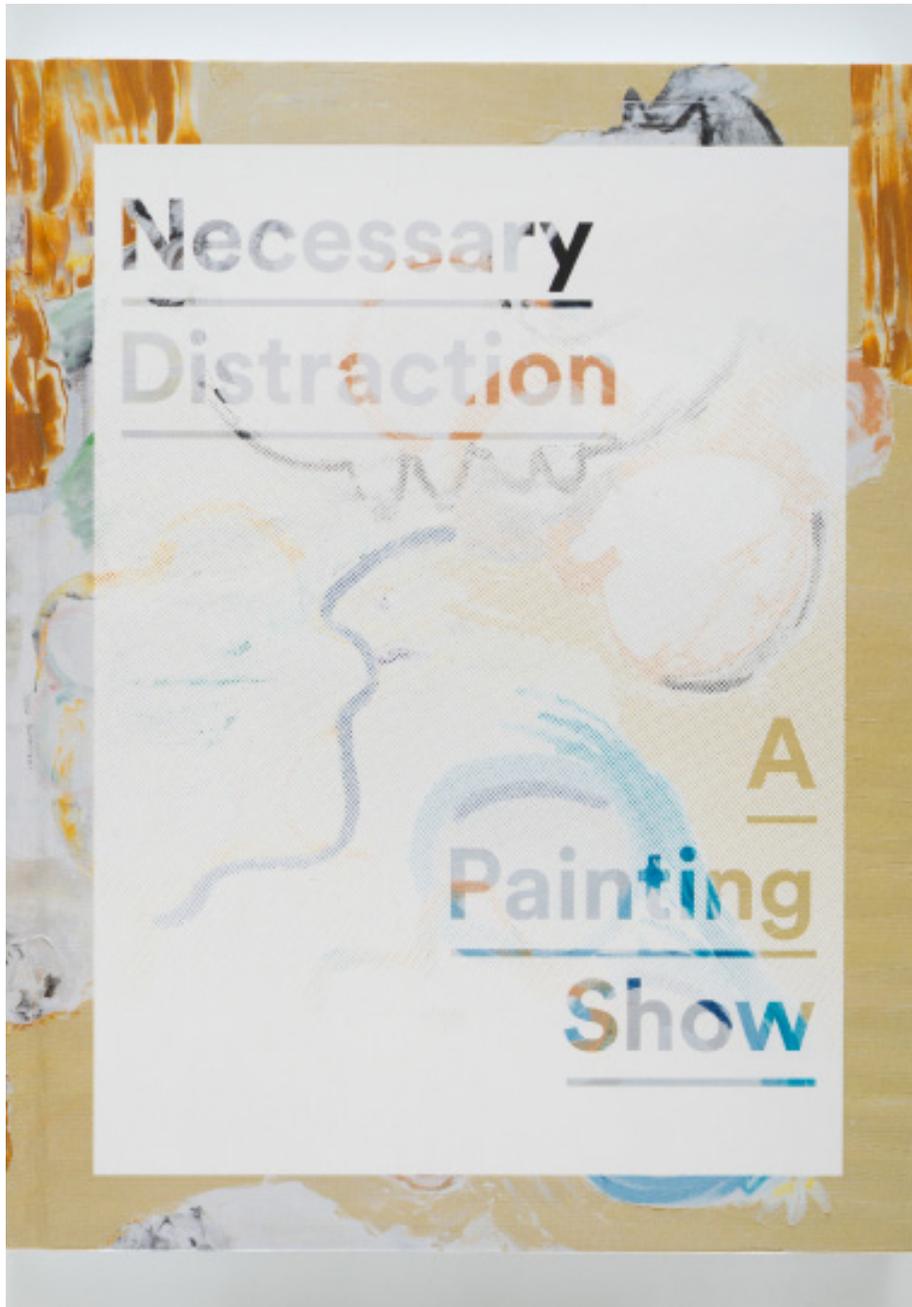
www.artcollector.net.au

1. // Stella Corkery, *Ears Burning*, 2015. Oil, spray paint, kikuyu grass and twine on canvas board, 35 x 45cm

2. // Stella Corkery, *Smoke Rings*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 50 x 60cm.

3. // Stella Corkery, *Pipe*, 2014. Oil on canvas, 60 x 50cm.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND MICHAEL LETT, AUCKLAND



Stella Corkery
Born 1960, Tuatapere
Lives and works in Auckland, New Zealand

Musical improvisation has played a critical role in establishing Stella Corkery's art practice, through which she responds to a constant stream of visual information then recompiles it. Evading a set artistic position, Corkery's latest painting series moves towards a post-Pop sensibility. Here, denuded, almost comic matter – a pair of glasses, a vase, flowers, ducks, horses – shares space with Corkery's rapid and emphatic application of paint.

Her process, which is fast and open to impulse and change, experiments with the idea that we are surrounded by a mass of images and gestures that have been decoded and fragmented, resulting in a reduction of authenticity. In this way, Corkery questions how to attend to human agency – political and individual. 'Cuteness' as a symbol of dumbness enters the work as a means to engage with a languishing system of care and political indifference. The sometimes visible pony is a particular reference to the artist's own history with 1990s third wave feminism. The paintings raise questions for Corkery such as, What forms of our past might engage meaningfully in this new flat bed of values, beliefs and consumption? And, Can painting's tools for absorbing this condition also provide a means for its discussion and debate?

Stella Corkery
I Haven't Been Anywhere or Seen Anyone
2015
oil and gesso on canvas
1250 x 1000mm

Art0

Necessary Distraction: New Zealand's new painting

By HENRY OLIVER, 03 Dec 2015



Stella Corkery, *Smoke and Butterfly* 2015, oil and gesso on canvas, 1250 x 1000mm, courtesy of the artist and Michael Lett (detail)

Last week, *Necessary Distraction: A Painting Show*, an exhibition of over a hundred works from twenty contemporary New Zealand artists opened at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. Henry Oliver talks to Natasha Conland, the exhibition's curator, about the exhibition and the re-emergence of painting in contemporary art in New Zealand.

Why now? Why exhibit a large survey show of contemporary New Zealand painting in 2015?

It's a show I'd thought about doing for a while. Around 2010 it seemed like in New Zealand, and internationally, that there was a reassurance of interest in painting practices and a question around where painting sits today, after forty-odd years of doubt and flagellation.

The question was: Is there was a new kind of painting emerging? Is it painting extending itself? Or is it, that after all this doubt, that artists are still motivated to paint and that painting provides this space of resistance that is interesting – resistance to the diversification of materials in art and also resistance to critique. Has it, in an interesting way, absorbed critique and moved on in a way that shows that the practice has the capacity to reform and reshape?

Five or more years ago I did a show that was to do with painting that wasn't painting but now it felt really important to me to go back to the basic modes of painting and examine those, and in particular, it felt like there is a bunch of artists that are corrupting those traditional categories of abstraction and figuration and being much more flexible in their thinking around those art forms, which have really got quite entrenched in New Zealand's art history and it's viewing culture as well.

What is the significance of the title, *Necessary Distraction*? Distraction from what?

There are a couple of different ways of thinking about the title. One of them is to try and situate the audience in an idea of the present. I was interested in how artists might stop us in a moment and create this sense that we are just with them in that moment and in the moment to come, rather than artist that telling stories through their work about the past.

But the title *Necessary Distraction* was about saying to audiences, 'This is important', i.e. it's necessary. And it's necessary to give yourself to this space of distraction. I'm not saying that painting is a nice diversion – not that interpretation of the world 'distraction' – but it's like 'distraction' as a synonym of 'disturbance'.

Distraction is classified as the key mode of our age, where we're constantly living with a short attention span, and my idea was not to be so critical of that, but to think about how artists actually mediate that through their work.

Ten years ago there was the Saatchi exhibition *Triumph of Painting*. Is painting always going in and out of fashion?

It's been a long time since public institutions have dealt with a medium-specific show on painting. Earlier this year, coincidentally, MoMA in New York had an exhibition called *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World* (<http://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1455?locale=en>), the first major group show of painting in years. This is the first time the Auckland Art Gallery has had contemporary painting show since 1992 and that was on quite a small scale too. So weirdly, these two exhibitions are related in some way.

For the general public, when they think of art, they think of painting. It's status has not been diminished by this period of doubt. This is the other thing about this show. We have an exhibition looking at painting and then people arrive and think, 'Hey, this isn't what I was expecting'. So it's possible for painting to not look like itself.

What was the thinking behind exhibition installation – the walls, the half-finished house look of it?

Really early on in the development of the exhibition, I was quite clear that I wanted to be able to create a series of temporary walls so that we could have this combination, in a large group show, of spaces of intimacy and spaces of correlation. So the viewer can have almost a private experience of an artist's work and at the same time have a line through to another artists, so two artists might be seen in relationship to each other.

That meant that we were going to have a lot of build in the gallery. From an ethical point of view, I really struggle with the amount of waste that goes into wall building but also, when all the walls are finished to the level we usually require, there's a very definite architectural feel to that space. Coupled with paint's status, I really didn't want to situate painting in this conservative atmosphere, this high culture infrastructure.

Also, when it came closer to thinking about how to describe the series of artist I'd chosen and what their intentions were, I was writing a lot about these artists exploring modes of unfixeness, or suggestiveness or unresolvedness and it felt to me like steering the internal design to reflect this overall atmosphere might create a dynamic space.

And now that it's open and people are seeing it, what's surprising you about it? What connections are you seeing between the artists and between the works?

In making a show, you still have thoughts about it after it's actually finally realised and often it's the unconscious processes that come to be realised in my exhibitions – the unconscious ideas or the unconscious connections between artists – are the things that you only start to see when the show is finally up.

One of the things that's really struck me in this exhibition is in the new work that's been made, there's a number of quite personal tropes coming through in the artist's work. Artists who you wouldn't usually expect to see their own subjectivity exposed, have drawn on some quite personal references in their work.

Like in Oliver Perkins for example, he has used a colour pallet from a walk he does regularly with his daughter and it's 'Who's afraid of walking Frida'. Ngataiharuru Taepa has made a tribute work to [Manos Nathan](http://www.maoriart.org.nz/manos-nathan-p-405.html) who was a close friend of his father's and the work, in his mind, develops a kind of character of the 1970s with its laminated wood panels.

I have resurrected a connection between Rosy Parlane and Jeena Shin which was a really early collaboration they did at Room Gallery. Rosy will make a sound work in response to Jeena's work. That's an old friendship that hasn't had much outing as part of Jeena's work. In Anoushka Akel's new body of work, she's explored the very tactile relationship between her body and the surface of a painting, which is very new for her work. There are lots of those personal moments and I don't know how to make sense of that yet in terms of the overall show, I feel a little bit honored in a way.



Nick Austin, *Traveling Envelope #5*, 2013, acrylic on newspaper, 575 x 785mm, courtesy of Hopkinson Mossman

Like that selection of work from Nick Austin. That series for me has a real personal resonance, it's the first work he did when he and Saskia [Leek] moved to Dunedin. It feels to me like a calling back to Auckland in lots of ways. Like the big long road, and this meditation on what distance really means in a digital age, this envelope sitting alongside something that feels a bit like State Highway 1, nobody mails anymore and they seldom to the big drive, certainly not from Auckland to Dunedin to visit their friends.

Someone wrote this really nice email to me, which I think sums up the mood. They wrote: "I think this exhibition will do much to add energy to the New Zealand painting scene and will add luster". This is Rob Gardiner. He's not meaning that the New Zealand painting scene needs something, he's just meaning it hopefully will create discussion and dialog. And that's so important. And maybe a bit absent.

Necessary Distraction: A Painting Show is on at [Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki](http://www.aucklandartgallery.com/) until 28 March 2016.

It includes the work of (in alphabetical order): Anoushka Akel, Dan Arps, Nick Austin, Andrew Barber, Kirstin Carlin in collaboration with Emma Fitts, Stella Corkery, James Cossins, Nicola Farquhar, Julian Hooper, Simon Ingram, Milli Jannides, Saskia Leek, Patrick Lundberg, Oliver Perkins, Kim Pieters, Jeena Shin in collaboration with Rosy Parlane, Ngatai Taepa, Barbara Tuck, Adrienne Vaughan.

And it's free!

Why Artist Stella Corkery Thinks We Should Slow Down

In a world bombarded by a myriad of throwaway images, visitors to Auckland Art Gallery are invited to drink in and reflect on paintings from 20 New Zealand contemporary painters

By Dan Ahwa



Stella Corkery, Gas Light 2015. Oil and gesso on canvas. 1250 x 2000mm.

Wednesday Nov 25, 2015

Necessary Distraction: A Painting Show opens this weekend at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki with more than 100 paintings from 20 established and emerging New Zealand contemporary artists. The works selected focus on the idea of eradicating past boundaries associated with painting in order to involve the viewer in a conversation between art work and idea. We chat to Stella Corkery whose painting will be a part of the exhibition.

What was the process like working with curator Natasha Corland and the Auckland Art Gallery selecting work that you both felt represented this idea of painting as an important medium in a world of throwaway imagery and social media immediacy?

In the past my installations have involved multiple hangs which in one way responds to a world of fast moving multiple images. For instance, the Freedom Farmers exhibition in 2013 at Auckland Art Gallery. I brought 70 paintings to the gallery to work with for install, with the intention of working with a little over half, and in the end we chose 38.

For this show, I created a dozen or so paintings and again we will choose around half depending how they work within the gallery space. We are presenting fewer works with the aim to slow things down and change the paradigm of the fast moving viewing process.

My practice is involved with discussing contemporary concerns so ideas around throwaway imagery or the banal are interesting to me. Anyway nothing is really banal – there's always something going on, on another level, a sign for something else or a political concern etc. Social media immediacy involves complex sets of human behaviours, one of those being authority.

Just to begin with a painting of something is immediately a copy. Images move through our lives as copies. Sometimes I think of my work as being "alleged paintings". Painting is in the business of creating images and isn't that what we are all about in the contemporary? Has there ever been a more relevant time for the oldest form of image making to be at work? On the physical side of things, a painting is of the real world (as opposed to the virtual) and as a sometimes-large object it can be so present, which is also a valid contemporary experience.

Gas Light (2015) is one of your most recent works; explain the meaning behind this piece.

Gas Light began with a plan. When I accepted it wasn't going so well I largely abandoned it and turned it into a series of improvisations on the previous forms (mistakes). There were motifs I wanted to try to maintain such as the glasses frame and clouds, smoke or bubbles – take your pick. This painting was actually a bit of the classic painter's battleground and definitely stress me out!

I worked on it intermittently over a period of weeks and finally reached some sort of formal resolution. I see the work as resting and not resting at the same time. I think the painting is involved with traditional and contemporary ways of seeing and looking but, on the other hand, it could be trying to avoid those things altogether.

How would you describe your painting style?

My painting practice involves traditional processes; I'm using wooden frames, canvas, gesso, oil paint, brushes. With painting having such a long, deep and loaded cultural history, I believe there is an irony embedded within this. The framing structure of the object is just as much a part of the painting as the intentionally drawn, gestural or improvised marks.

I can't think about my current work as being part of a style, that can be too restrictive and at times I like to work against a prescribed or dogmatic approach. I think painting can be in service of itself (painting about painting and the history of) but also need it to be open enough to present an idea that comes through from the outside.

How many of your works will be on display?

Anywhere between five and eight depending on what works at the time of installation.

What are you looking forward to the most about seeing this exhibition come to life?

How great an opportunity this is going to be to experience so many excellent and exciting New Zealand contemporary painters, with all their variations in practice and approach, all in the one incredible building over a number of months, leaving plenty of time for multiple visits.

- Necessary Distraction: A Painting Show opens this weekend at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
<http://www.aucklandartgallery.com/>



Stella Corkery: 010913 Stella Corkery, DDMYY, 2013

PERPETUAL IRRESOLUTION

Stella Corkery's paintings play with visual codes and material expectations, remixing the medium's cultural value.

WORDS: EMIL McAVOY

PHOTOGRAPHY: KALLAN MACLEOD

AUCKLAND-BASED PAINTER and experimental musician **Stella Corkery** describes her work as positioned at a "pressure point", and the polarities of abstraction and figuration "like two opposing magnets forced in to close proximity – they push back on each other and can never meet". The familiar iron-filings-on-the-table classroom experiment demonstrates the powerful magnetic field generated by such an act, as the two poles force the matter in between to adopt new and dynamic patterns of flux. Corkery's approach to painting – reflective of our current condition in which everything is on the table – manifests as a series of similarly structured near-misses. Her attempts to collide eclectic images, forms, histories and painting processes results in work that hovers in a state of perpetual irresolution.

Corkery invests in the provisional; in making paintings that look and feel unfinished, in-process, abandoned. She works hard to keep them in this state, attentive of when to lay down the brush – or any other tool she happens to be painting with. Her paintings' apparent clunkiness can be confrontational. Aesthetically, at least for this writer, they really push the boat out.

"I listen to music and I report back in paint." Corkery notes speaking to her history as a drummer in underground experimental and noise bands since the late 1980s – bands like *Angelhead*, *Queen Meanie Puss*, and

White Saucer. If, as artist **Julian Dashper** once remarked, "an artist is like a drummer who sets the rhythm for a culture", then Corkery isn't appeasing audiences with the psychological reassurance of a regular beat. Conscious of painting as a luxury good, yet playfully resistant to its commodity status, Corkery jams their signals in all senses of the word. Her work plays with visual codes and material expectations, remixing painting's eclectic histories and its mutable markers of cultural and financial value.

This ethos of playful resistance reflects certain values evident in the experimental music scene in Aotearoa New Zealand, spaces on the so-called cultural margins that actively resist commodification. "No one wants to buy an album of recordings made by dragging a chair across the floor," says the artist. I beg to differ. In fact, in part appears her paintings operate as a kind of visual equivalent – their lo-fi, stripped back, gestural construction may endear them to more adventurous audiences and collectors.

Corkery's work has sought to borrow from realms considered bad taste or passé, such as the iconography of psychedelia or what she refers to as "stoner art". Figurative elements like magic mushrooms and angel's trumpet (the powerful hallucinogen *datura*), were intended to allude to escapism, visionary experiences and living dangerously. To her surprise they ended up proving popular. "We

all go over the speed limit," she asserts.

Having formerly run the experimental Auckland fashion store *Bunny*, Corkery also sees her work in seasons. Her forthcoming Autumn release at Michael Lett contains a painting that features cheetah print, a design which recurs in selected recent work. For Corkery, cheetah print is akin to "a photocopy of a photocopy of a photocopy". The sheer scale of cheetah print's reproduction and popularity has created a compelling phenomenon embodying the self-referential and post-historical – an untruth-to-materials, forever un/fashionable zombie that just won't die. Another painting features strips of raw unprimed canvas adorning its surface like a custom-ripped Hulk Hogan T-shirt, with ruffles of the unprimed canvas stapled to the side the stretcher. The artist delights in this bent situation in which sincerity and irony now appear inseparable.

Entering study at the Elam School of Fine Arts, Corkery's approach to painting began with, as she states, "its successive deaths". In particular, the distinguished American art historian **David Joselit's** essay *Painting Beside Itself* influenced her focus on the dynamic field of ideas, discourses and other phenomena that orbit works of art. Joselit asks: "How does painting belong to a network?" Corkery's paintings connect with the fringes of the noise music milieu through to the above-ground contemporary art scene.



Corkery showed in an early iteration of the influential Auckland artist-run space *Teststrip* and co-ran the Chippendale House exhibition and performance venue with other local Dunedin musicians. More recently, she was included in several large-scale public exhibitions, *Freedom Farmers* (2014), and *Necessary Distraction* (2015–16), both curated by **Natasha Conland** at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

Although perhaps not immediately discernible in the paintings themselves, Corkery is also motivated by feminist concerns. She asserts that her work can embody and communicate these ideas without retreating

to explicit messages. We may find oblique references to her "rallying the troops", as she puts it, in several new paintings entitled *War Horse* – comrades she may be seen to ride in the fight against the likes of **Trump**. Corkery's fast and loose post-punk riot grrrrr sensibility may be just what the resistance requires – celebrating painting as an act of liberation.

Our conversation returns to the intersection of painting and fashion. Ever charting her own course, the artist describes an analogy of painting as tawling a clothing store and trying things on. "Can I help you?" the retailer asks. "No, thank you," she replies. "I will find it myself."

STELLA CORKERY'S SOLO EXHIBITION RUNS AT MICHAEL LETT, AUCKLAND, FROM 22 APRIL TO 23 MAY 2020. PLEASE CONFIRM DATES WITH THE GALLERY AMIDST COVID-19 CLOSURES.



PREVIOUS PAGE LEFT: Stella Corkery, *Neck Piece*, 2020. Oil, canvas, staples and gesso on canvas, 52 x 40cm.
 PREVIOUS PAGE RIGHT: Stella Corkery, *Sleeping*, 2020. Oil and silk georgette on canvas, 30 x 40.5cm.
 ABOVE: Stella Corkery, *Teeth in the Mouth*, 2020. Oil on canvas, 70 x 50cm.
 RIGHT: Stella Corkery, *War Horse*, 2020. Oil and gesso on canvas, 100 x 80cm.
 OPPOSITE: Stella Corkery, *War Horse*, 2020. Oil, acrylic and gesso on canvas, 100 x 75cm.
 COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND MICHAEL LETT, AUCKLAND.



JACK WILLET
 Curator and writer

"I have always viewed Stella Corkery's practice as a series of gestures; a melding of physical and conceptual actions that unfold throughout her paintings and her larger creative output. I first witnessed this dynamism with her mass presentation of canvases in *Caravan* (STATION, Melbourne, 2014), a multi-layered hang presenting a sea of abstract images. This display forced your eyes to dart or "swipe" from image to image — suggestive of our capitalist realism, where images are fast and frequent — taking in each work's unique painterly motions. Such paintings come into being through the action of conceptualising with brush in hand; Corkery bypasses preliminary tools such as sketching, embracing a preference for immediacy.

"Yet I have always found much of Corkery's predilection for painterly mark-making reminiscent of the hand of one who draws, particularly in her works on velvet. These paintings, say those from *No Direction Home* (TCB, Melbourne, 2017), present seemingly folklore-like imagery that appear via sinuous flourishes scraped back into the oil to reveal the rich, luminous coloured velvet. Corkery's subtle gestures, along with her free jazz and post-punk-inspired abstractions, present work rich with a true artist's hand, gesturing both literally and conceptually."

ANDREW THOMAS
 Director, Michael Lett, Auckland

"We first presented Stella's work at the gallery in 2014. Prior to that, we had been aware of Stella's work through her engagement in the artist-run scene in Auckland. In particular the show that really hit me initially was an exhibition of about 40 paintings closely double hung at an artist-run gallery called Gloria Knight. That particular series of paintings went on to be shown at The Auckland Art Gallery in an exhibition curated by *Natasha Conland* in 2013 called *Freedom Farmers*. Like us, other people were struck by the energy and visceral potency of those works.

"Stella has also had a long and close involvement in the music scene in New Zealand, and her paintings reflected this — they had an attitude, the volume was sonic, but amid the distortion there were very delicate controlled moments, and you could tell there was more at play in the work than the application of paint to canvas. Stella was again featured at The Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki with new work in *Necessary Distraction: A Painting Show* (2015). Her work is held in some important collections. It's also owned and coveted by other artists, which is something I find more comfort in than auction prices."

