

Mānawatia Takatāpui  
Defending Plurality

## **MĀNAWATIA TAKATĀPUI:**

**DEFENDING PLURALITY** is an expansive exhibition developed by Tāmaki Makaurau-based artist and activist Shannon Novak. Taking a variety of forms across several galleries at Tauranga Art Gallery, as well as selected offsite venues, it foregrounds Novak's unique dual role as both an acclaimed multi-disciplinary artist and a full-time advocate in the LGBTQI+ community. Assuming the role of both artist and curator, Novak's exhibition is grounded in a large-scale floor-based installation and a series of distinct transformations of latent areas of Tauranga Art Gallery, each developed to subtly colour the experience of the exhibition.

Novak's visually arresting floor-based installation *Bifröst* (2021) explores the lexicon of the LGBTQI+ community, foregrounding the visual language of global movements which advance inclusion and diversity. The installation has been specially conceived for the Gallery's ground level spaces. For Novak, it boldly declares the Gallery as a safe space for the expanded rainbow community, whilst simultaneously creating a visually jarring installation which channels the contested nature of this ambition, during a time when many LGBTQI+ individuals still experience marginalisation and prejudice.

The exhibition continues in the Gallery's Level 2 spaces, which have been developed in close conversation with the artist. Novak was invited to select and make space for works by others in the LGBTQI+ community, creating more latitude to both expand his interests as an artist and advance his advocacy work with this community. The exhibition centres a range of LGBTQI+ practitioners from Aotearoa, with a particular focus on rainbow BIPOC that may or may not identify with the LGBTQI+ acronym, including but not limited to Takatāpui and MVPFAFF+. The selection of works provide a focused cross-section of leading multi-generational and multi-disciplinary artists currently working in the scene.

Extending his treatment of the downstairs galleries, Novak continues to exhibit work of his own in situ, through a suite of brightly-coloured and focused interventions in latent areas of the Gallery, including the lift, skylights, a concealed window, and other easily overlooked areas of the building. In each instance Novak takes cues from the given spaces – exploiting the ways that, for instance, a concealed window might be 'tuned' and adapted to draw attention to another event, a skylight might become a prismatic filter for pride flags, and so on. In this way both personal and historical events continue to be interwoven into our experience of the building.

In the nearby Cube Gallery, Novak provides space for other voices in the rainbow community in Tauranga Moana and beyond. The texts on the large plinth have been written by various contributors, each responding to an open invitation to share—unfiltered—their experiences as rainbow BIPOC. The texts range from light poems to heartfelt letters to a lost loved one, collectively surveying the joys and challenges still faced by individuals in this community. As a gesture of solidarity, Novak and the

contributors also requested that this gallery be renamed for the duration of the show. Its new title, Te Wāhi Hiere, directly translates as 'a place of singing', conveying the strength of collective voices expressed in harmony.

Situated under a coloured lightbox set into the ceiling, Novak produces the first of two homages to important figures in the LGBTQI+ community. An understated suite of historical photographs bring to light New Plymouth-based Colleen White, an unknown figure who identifies as transsexual and who won a beauty pageant in Wellington, being crowned 'Queen of Queens', 1984. Nearby, Niu Creative present a confronting image of Shaneel Lal, an activist based in Auckland, who is pictured advancing equity for the contemporary rainbow BIPOC community in such a way that draws strength from their ancestors.

Novak's second homage is presented in the nearby lift, where he has worked with Tāmaki Makaurau-based intersex-activist Eliana Rubashkyn. Rubashkyn's *Indivisibility Flag* (2021) has been scaled to wrap over three walls in the lift. An excerpt from Rubashkyn's poem (presented in full on the plinth) is also present, which was written while Rubashkyn was detained in 2013 in a shipping container awaiting entry to Hong Kong. The poem describes Rubashkyn's harrowing experience of being rendered stateless for several months due to immigration complications arising from their gender identification. Rubashkyn was eventually granted citizenship in New Zealand in 2018.

Seen as a whole, the exhibition presents a compelling case for the need to celebrate our rainbow community. While in no way attempting to be a comprehensive survey of artists from the LGBTQI community, it nonetheless is ambitious in its scale and range of concerns. It expresses the vitality of rainbow artists working in the scene – at the top of their game. But it also creates space for newcomers in the art scene, as well as figures who have had no prior presence in the art world but are significant voices in the public domain. Importantly, Novak has invited the local Rainbow community into the Gallery, ensuring that they have a voice. The historically layered concerns in this show continually mix and interact with contemporary issues facing the rainbow community, building a compelling case for the need to continually acknowledge, celebrate and advocate for difference and inclusivity, to defend plurality in everything that this aspiration entails.

## LEVEL 1

*Mural (outside)*

KAAN HIINI

*He Takatāpui Ahau, 2021*

Inkjet print on vinyl. Courtesy of the artist

## ENTRANCE FOYER

SHANNON NOVAK

*Case 108, 2021.*

Acrylic and vinyl. Courtesy of the artist

*Case 108* recalls a tragic 1959 incident for the rainbow community in Paraguay. The event arose in the city of Asunción when a suspicious explosion resulted in a fire that led to the death of Bernardo Aranda, a popular radio presenter. Multiple witnesses identified an individual, with close ties to Aranda, as being likely responsible for the violent act. Yet it is now understood that due to the anonymous suspect's extensive political ties an elaborate cover up ensued, orchestrated with the full resources of Alfredo Stroessner's dictatorship. Mobilising the press, a malicious campaign was orchestrated geared to fuel homophobia and pass blame for the incident onto the homosexual community. When the police were mobilised a full witch hunt commenced, resulting in 108 gay men being rounded up and brutally persecuted, with many losing their lives.

Today several Paraguayan LGBTQI+ groups have reclaimed this number to ensure that the terrible treatment of these 108 victims is not forgotten. Through this simple work, Novak likewise claims the figure as a symbol of resistance and pride. He makes use of a serendipitous connection between the 108 holes detailed in a wall of the Gallery (typically reserved for a bespoke shelving system in the Gallery shop). Repurposing this area, he commemorates the Case 108 victims with a line of text borrowed from a poem by Ángel Domínguez responding to the incident:

*No haber amado como quisimos.*

*(Not having loved as we wanted.)*

*No haber amado como pudimos.*

*(Not having loved as we could.)*

*No haber amado como debimos.*

*(Not having loved as we should.)*

While such witch hunts would seem archaic, they still occur both globally and locally in New Zealand. In Novak's words, 'we're still not able to love as we want, love as we could, love as we should. We're still being beaten for holding hands in public and advocating for our basic human rights in the background of community groups that advance conversion therapy.'

## ENTRANCE FOYER, ATRIUM, STAIRS, EDUCATION ROOM

SHANNON NOVAK

*Biffröst, 2021.*

Vinyl on floor

Courtesy of the artist



## LEVEL 2

*Clockwise from main staircase*

ALICIA FRANKOVICH

*Microchimerism, 2018.*

Gold and pink vinyl on wall

Courtesy of the artist and Starkwhite, Auckland

Berlin/Australian based artist Alicia Frankovich is known for her multi-faceted practice which encompasses sculpture, video, installation, and live performance.

'Microchimerism' is a medical term which describes the presence of DNA from one or more bodies in another person. This phenomenon is most commonly observed in pregnant woman, where it was discovered that chromosomes of the yet-to-be-born-child don't remain confined to the infant, but instead can be traced to far reaching parts of the mother's body, including her heart and brain. Remarkably, these chromosomes remain in the mother's body after birth, meaning that features of the child continue to live on in the parent.

To produce *Microchimerism*, Frankovich provided her DNA in the form of a blood sample to medical practitioners, who scanned and mapped her female chromosome profile, which has been simplified and enlarged to scale the wall. Gold silhouettes designate the cells that are medically determined to belong to Frankovich, while the pick shapes indicate foreign chromosomes which reside in the artist's body. From this we can draw multiple conclusions. Firstly, the boundaries of Frankovich's 'private body' are clearly blurred, causing us to question precisely where her private body ends and her public-self begins. Secondly, as these cells also determine one's sex, Frankovich demonstrates that from a medical perspective aspects of her gender are fluid. At a microscopic level we each possess male and female characteristics, which are determined by our interactions with others.

## BRENT HARRIS

*On becoming (Green no. 11), 1996.*

*Apron of Abuse, 1992.*

*Forecast Cloudy, 2018-2020.*

**All oil on linen**

**Courtesy of Robert Heald Gallery, Wellington**

In *Apron of Abuse*, Harris recalls the paintings of Colin McCahon, whose distinctive use of text, colour and form have influenced many of his early works. It also refers to two artworks by important international figures; German painter Sigmar Polke's *Large Cloth of Abuse* (1968), a larger two-dimensional canvas which Polke painted over with abusive words, and American-sculptor Robert Gober's *Slip Covered Armchair* (1986-1987), which also featured hand-painted pansies on an upholstered armchair.

Harris remarks:

*I remember being called a Pansy! (a term of abuse not so popular these days). This brought to mind Sigmar Polke's large text work, which I recall having seen a shot of Polke wearing like a protective garment, as if he was embracing the abuse and claiming it ... Another work by an artist I admire, Robert Gober, images beautiful pansies in his sculpture. I decided to address my own moment of applied abuse through an artwork of my own, a small painting, which domesticates Polke's large cloth, and steals Gober's pansies. Although my painting is small, the neck scallop may indicate a different scale.*

The accompanying two paintings are similarly layered in art historical references, including a nod to the American painter Philip Guston. While produced in playfully simple lines and forms, such as the 'smiley face' in *On becoming (Green no. 11)*, the paintings are also coded with frequent intimations of male desire.

## AREEZ KATKI

*Dwelling, 2017.*

**Cotton thread embroidery on upholstered silk**

*Drapery, 2019.*

**Cotton and silk thread embroidery on 80% linen/  
20% cellulose textile**

**Courtesy of the artist and Tim Melville, Auckland**

Areez Katki's use of carefully embroidered fabrics is multi-layered. He crosses the traditional gulf between art and craft in a way that is distinctly contemporary. Katki is precisely attracted to the way such fabrics were not traditionally favoured by male artists – due to their 'feminine' qualities of softness and malleability. The manner by which Katki works with these materials, then, is intentionally gendered, and seeks to skew stereotypes of masculinity based on strength and hardness.

Each object is stitched by hand over many hours. Katki's embroidered drawings imply traces of the body on familiar surfaces which speak to basic human needs to be clothed and cared for.

## SHANNON NOVAK

*La Vie en rose, 2021.*

**Acrylic on recessed wall cavity**

**Courtesy of the artist**

*This is a triangular section of the gallery painted in the four colours of the non-binary flag (yellow, white, purple and black). The direct modification to an architectural feature of the building represents an attempt to break or disrupt the heteronormative binaries in the world around us. Quite literally in this case where the angular space is a disruption in an otherwise linear space. The title 'Le Vie en rose' (life in pink) is quoted from Grace Jones, a singer who is the embodiment of disruption.*

—Shannon Novak

## CAO XUN

*Hypoxia, 2020.*

**Digital photographic print on hahnemühle etching paper**

**Courtesy of the artist**

*The subjects in Cao Xun's photographs withdraw even further into themselves. They bend and curl into unnatural poses, wrapped in all manner of apparel, recognisable and unrecognisable.*

—Moya Lawson

Cao Xun's works are informed by both art and fashion photography. This highly processed image has been photographed and digitally enhanced, resulting in luminous surfaces which are both seductive and abhorrent.

On closer inspection, we can identify two intertwined male bodies. The skin-tight silicon which binds the bodies together also traps condensation and sweat – making it impossible to tell where one body begins and the other ends.

Cao's practice has been described as seeking to expand on the representation of queer experience. While his earlier work has been light and playful in tone, these works explore a deeper anxiety which can be connected to his attempt to reclaim a quality of 'queerness' and to channel this into a distinctive visual language. The challenges involved in inverting and reclaiming this historically derogatory term are not lost on Cao. His work plays off a persona of being odd, strange, an outsider. In this way he deftly throws these challenges of identification back on the viewer.

## LONG GALLERY

*Clockwise from left*

SHANNON NOVAK

*Holding Cells: Recalibrated, 2021.*

Digital photographic prints

Courtesy of the artist



TELLY TUITA

*Summer Death, 2020.*

*Autumn Famine, 2020.*

*Winter Conquest, 2020.*

*War in Spring, 2020.*

Digital photographic prints

Courtesy of the artist

Photographer: Nick Shackleton

Telly Tuita's practice encompasses painting, printmaking, sculpture, installation, photo-media and performance. In each of these large-scale photographs, produced in partnership with photographer Nick Shackleton, these distinct strands of his creative output combine to form multi-layered portraits.

Tuita was born in Tonga in 1980 and immigrated to Sydney at nine years of age. Living in Australia for most of his life, his work frequently responds to his sense of being disconnected from his Tongan homeland. Tuita's large-scale paintings draw from his Tongan heritage and are layered into these compositions as backdrops. The artist is pictured in the centre of each image with his head frequently obscured by a range of masks and adornments. The various props and images deployed in each photograph suggest a range of personal and cultural narratives, each evading a single reading. He is both soothsayer and saint, boozier and saviour. The images carefully navigate a desire for belonging while simultaneously challenging idealised depictions of the Pacific Islands and his ancestral land.

ALICIA FRANKOVICH

*Defending Plural Experiences, 2017.*

Single-channel video, 36 minutes, 28 seconds

Courtesy of the artist and Starkwhite, Auckland

The name for Frankovich's second work in this exhibition, *Defending Plural Experiences*, is shadowed in this exhibition's title. Like *Defending Plurality*, Frankovich seeks to make space in her work for a spectrum of experiences which deliberately skew and probe ideas of gendered behaviour. The artwork was first presented in Melbourne as part of a large-scale solo exhibition at ACCA (Australian Centre for Contemporary Art) in 2017, and many of the individuals who feature in this work performed live at ACCA throughout the run of the exhibition.

Casey Carsel describes the shared language of the live performances, and those presented in this video, as follows:

*Frankovich cast a group of performers—both trained and untrained—and choreographed a performance with them in the butterfly enclosure of Melbourne's zoo. The performers completed a series of movements such as giving birth (a gender-neutral role in Frankovich's choreography) or pretending to be an animal, as well as more abstract gestures. In the film made from the performance recording, Frankovich includes shots of both the butterflies and the performers. Overlapping this footage is an avatar following its own set of choreography. In some manifestations, this avatar looks strikingly similar to the artist herself. In works such as *Defending Plural Experiences*, the viewer witnesses Frankovich's interest in transitional states—the body's movement from one form to another. In this, Frankovich allows the viewer to consider bodies beyond their physical givens, reaching out to deeper potentials of plurality.*

PAUL DARRAGH

*Vogue, 2021.*

Acrylic on wall

Courtesy of the artist

The term 'vogue' has been in common usage since the 15th Century. Then as now, it defines the pinnacle of popular fashion and opinion – the qualities that might make us 'in vogue'.

In this work, Tauranga-based painter Paul Darragh celebrates the qualities of the rainbow community that have continued to influence high-end fashion, clubbing and other forms of popular culture. Darragh was invited to reinvestigate the background graphics he produced for Rhianna's 2013 music video *Rude Boy*. The resulting painting has been produced through the manual process of masking and hand-painting the large work over several days. It brings to light the numerous sources that were at play in the creation of the video, including nods to drag culture and fashion, the street art of Keith Haring, and the costume design of Jean-Paul Goude, famously donned by Grace Jones in many photo shoots. Light and celebratory in tone, Darragh presents an absorbing picture of the vitality the rainbow community in visual culture.

**SHANNON NOVAK**

*Fluid*, 2021.

Digital print on polyester

Courtesy of the artist

*I created the Fluid flag in 2021. It is composed of an aquamarine and orange bar with a wave-like form in the middle. The movement or fluidity of colour between the aquamarine and orange bars represents a fluidity or change in dimensions of self over time such as (but not limited to) sexual orientation, romantic orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression.*

—Shannon Novak

For further information visit:

<http://www.shannonnovak.com/ongoing-projects#/fluid-flag/>

**RUSS FLATT**

*Destination Aroha* (1 of 8 in series), 2021.

Digital print on polyester

Courtesy of the artist and Tim Melville, Auckland

*Destination Aroha* is one of eight flags commissioned in 2020 by Te Tuhi, Auckland, in association with Auckland Arts Festival Te Ahurei Toi o Tāmaki Makaurau & New Zealand Maritime Museum Hui Te Ananui a Tangaroa, developed to promote pride and care for the LGBTQI+ community.



## **PROJECTION ROOM**

(Two works looped)

**TANU GAGO**

*APPARATUS*, 2018.

Single-channel video, 19 minutes, 28 seconds

Courtesy of the artist

Commissioned by Ioana Gordon Smith for

From *The Shore*, Te Uru, Waitākere Contemporary Art Gallery 2018.

Artist / Director: Tanu Gago

Camera: Ralph Brown

Styling: Jasper Powell

Sound & Editing: Tanu Gago

Choreography: Jacob Tamata, Cypris Afakasi

Adornments: Rosanna Raymond,

Pati Solomona Tyrell

**ALIYAH WINTER**



*Hardening*, 2018.

Single channel video, 4 minutes, 19 seconds

Courtesy of the artist

In *Hardening*, Aliyah Winter revisits the life of Hjelmar von Danneville (1860-1930). Born in Denmark, von Danneville lived in Wellington from 1911-1918. Due to their short hair, 'masculine' dress, and foreign accent, von Danneville was accused of being a German spy during heightened tensions of WWI, a claim that led to their unjustified detainment on Matiu Somes Island for a period of six weeks. The experience significantly impacted von Danneville, causing them to experience a nervous breakdown. Ironically, this decline in health led to von Danneville being promptly transferred back to Lahmann Health Home in Mirimar, Wellington – an alternative healthcare facility that von Danneville had worked in as a carer prior to detainment.

The Lahmann Health Home followed the principles of the facilities namesake, German physician Dr. Heinrich Lahmann. Winter's title, *Hardening*, is a direct translation of the German word 'abhärtung', Dr. Lahmann's term for his holistic method of exposing the body to the elements in order to stimulate a healthy and functioning body. In this video, Aliyah Winter is filmed re-enacting these rituals of exposing her body to the elements at the site of the Lahmann Health Home. In retracing the steps of von Danneville and re-enacting these activities, she presents a sobering meditation on the plight of an early exponent of gender non-conformity in Aotearoa.

## TE WĀHI HIERE (CUBE GALLERY)

### Table

PHYLESHA BROWN-ACTON

Untitled text, 2014

JŽOE

*Mirrors*, 2019

SHANEEL LAL

Untitled text, 2020

ELIANA RUBASHKYN

*Alienation*, 2013-14

ARPÉGE TARATO

*Rainbow and Boxes*, 2021

Untitled poem, 2021

HARIATA WILSON

*Whaiaipō*, 2021

COLLEEN WHITE

Untitled poem, 1979

### Ceiling lightboxes/ west wall

SHANNON NOVAK

*Queen of Queens (for Colleen White)*, 2021.

Transparent vinyl, four archival photos

Courtesy of the artist

## LIFT

ELIANA RUBASHKYN and

SHANNON NOVAK

*Indivisibilidad/ Indivisibility*, 2021.

Vinyl

Courtesy of the artists

## OFFSITE VENUES:

### Baycourt

ELIANA RUBASHKYN

*Indivisibility Flag*, 2021.

Polyester

Courtesy of the designer

SHANNON NOVAK

*Fluid Flag*, 2021.

Polyester

Courtesy of the artist

### Bayfair

SHANNON NOVAK

*Tūmanakotanga*, 2021.

Vinyl on windows

Courtesy of the artist

### The Incubator

PAUL DARRAGH and

SHANNON NOVAK

*Cross Together*, 2021.

Acrylic on road

Courtesy of the artists

### The Kollektive

SHANNON NOVAK

*Tokomanawa*, 2021.

Inkjet print on vinyl

Courtesy of the artist

### Our Place Magazine

SHANNON NOVAK

*Fluid*, 2021. (cover)

*Mānawatia Takatāpui/Defending Plurality: Measure*, 2021.

(full-page insert)

Our Place Magazine, Issue 35, Aug / Sept 21

**Shannon Novak**

**MĀNAWATIA TAKATĀPUI /  
DEFENDING PLURALITY**

Tauranga Art Gallery Toi Tauranga  
23 July – 10 October 2021

**Participating artists and contributors:**

Phylesha Brown Acton, Paul Darragh, Russ Flatt,  
Alicia Frankovich, Areez Katki, Tanu Gago,  
Brent Harris, Kaan Hiini, Jzoe, Shaneel Lal,  
Eliana Rubashkyn, Arpège Taratoa, Telly Tuita,  
Aliyah Winter, Hariata Wilson, Colleen White,  
Cao Xun.

**Text:** Stephen Cleland

Produced on the occasion of the exhibition.

Director: Stephen Cleland  
Gallery Services Manager: Jillian Peck  
Exhibition Manager: Duane Moyle  
Exhibition Technician: Jamie Coxon  
Registrar: Amaria Kee-Huaki  
Education Manager: Mel McDonald  
Schools Liaison: Isabelle Mathys  
Educator: Fiona Wilcock  
Educator: Angie Ogilvy-Clark  
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our hard working Front of House team

Thanks to: Elliot Mason, Karl Sorstedt, Asher McMahan,  
Ally Drury, Sonya Lacey, Nicole Robertson, Reena Snook,  
Ayesha Kee, Simone Anderson, Gordy Lockhart, Robert  
Heald, Tim Melville, Michael Lett, Daniel du Bern and  
Courtney Lucas, Ben Black, Nemo Craig, RainbowYOUTH  
and the local LGBTQI+ community, Brent Smith.

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**PRINCIPLE EXHIBITION PARTNER:**

**CooneyLeesMorgan**

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*Tauranga City*

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