

# a fine line

TE RŌPŪ TOIKUPU O AOTEAROA New Zealand Poetry Society Magazine

art / mahi toi  
Spring 2023



FEATURED POET • essa may ranapiri  
FEATURED INTERVIEW • Jessica Hinerangi  
COVER ART • Māori Mermaid



**The Magazine of the  
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## *Quotation of the season*

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‘The work ... the work should  
speak for itself.’

— Ralph Hotere

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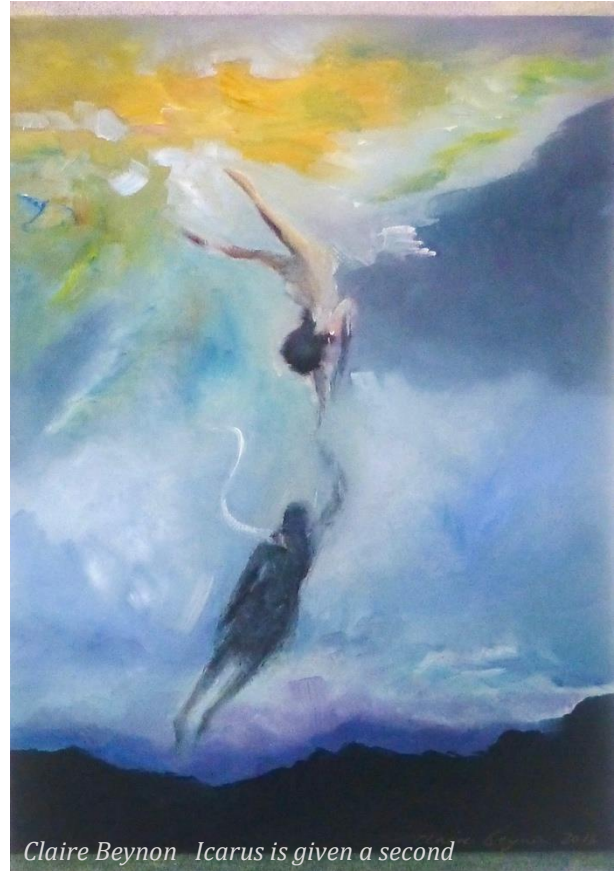
## Gail Ingram

Works of art in poetry you did in great numbers and we too offer you this mahi toi, *a fine line* spring edition. Full to the brim, you will find responses to paintings (**Brent Cantwell, Sarah Scott**), to taonga pūoro (**Claire Beynon**), to words on the spines of books (**Emma Neale**) and graffiti on a picnic table (**Ruben Mita**); from the practice of art (**Franciska Soares**) to failing at it (**Giles Graham**); from haiku about playing classical music with your toes (**Laurel Astle**) to finding art in nature (**Sue Courtney, Heather Lurie**), all of these poets are masters, mistresses, takatāpui of their craft, and I invite you in.

We are delighted in our pages to feature that wonderful brand of poet who is also *artist*, and one in particular, our cover artist **Māori Mermaid** also known as poet **Jessica Hinerangi**, whose debut poetry collection *Āria* of reconnection to her tūpuna and te ao Māori was published earlier this year. We talk to Jessica about her new book and her experience of being a Māori poet, artist and student in these Pākehā-dominated institutions. What serendipity too that our guest poet **essa may ranapiri** responded to one of Jessica's artworks in his opening poem "Merfolk Tribal". The 2023 recipient of the Janet Frame Award for Poetry, *essa's* poems are shapeshifters of force; whether evoking Maui, the pink taniwha 'who will eat your heartbreak' or 'walking backwards into gender', you will be startled, woken, moved in the way that the very best poetry entangles us 'like roots in our skin', oh.

Don't forget to read our reviews too. Featuring **Heidi North** reviewing *Aotearoa Poetry Handbook 2023: afterburn* and **Trevor Landers** reviewing *My American Chair* by **Elizabeth Smither**.

In NZPS news, bringing style to this edition we welcome to the team *a fine line's* new assistant editor **Sophia Wilson** along with new board member, poet taonga and academic **Robert Sullivan**. Our new board is excited to be developing new ways to open poetry and poets to air and light to flourish. Watch this space.



Our annual anthology is at the printers! Editors **Margaret Moores** and **Janet Newman** have created a gorgeously crafted book that includes the winners of our annual competition, myth-themed youth poetry, haiku as well as the adult open sections. There will be three launches around the country, kicking off with the first at Tūranga in Ōtautahi Christchurch on 7 December. Please keep an eye on the website and our social media for details. There will be readings from local and international poetry to celebrate!

Next issue, the summer edition, themed 'maths and science / pāngarau me pūtaiao', will include Fibonacci and Pi poems, poems inspired by fractals, prime numbers, physics, biology and periodic tables and your experiences in these fields. Please send up to four poems (40 lines max), up to four haiku, and your artwork by 20 November 2023 to Gail Ingram, [editor@poetrysociety.org.nz](mailto:editor@poetrysociety.org.nz).

So, enough from me ... let the work speak for itself.

**essa may ranapiri**



Māori Mermaid *Whaea Tuna*

## **Merfolk Tribal**

*after Maaori Mermaid's Whaea Tuna*

started playing Magic cos my partner and all  
my friends were enjoying that card crack game  
and now the merfolk have my heart  
all of Hinemoana's shiniest children an army  
you can't block  
these courageous island walkers  
our sea of scales and gloss and middle-fingers  
raised to the rising seas raised with the rising seas  
we'll flow over everything you've done  
and like real talk  
whenever I'm playing Magic with my friends  
and my lover  
I try to pronounce mana like manners  
cos I know the white bitch who took our word  
for magical juice didn't have the politeness to leave  
our shit the fuck alone without distorting it  
I go to sleep at night and dream of growing eels out  
of my head like some tuna-modded gorgon  
ready to make socially dead whatever man  
again trespasses our tikanga

**the beast on our wall will eat my heartbreak**

*after Kahurangiariki Smith's Hina*

you left us your pink taniwha  
to dance the walls of our whare  
to the slap of jandals  
as us bisexual baddies  
go for a feed of hot chips  
tomato sauce and salty goodness  
fuck yes we're living the life  
diving into the awa  
cos my gayass bitchass sentimental ass  
never wants to let go  
the Waikato is so big and strong she can take it all  
its hundreds of  
beauties of turns and turnings  
the whirlpool watching us  
as you eat m&ms a staple at the house  
because i knew she loved them  
afterwards the sun turns me into the whitest Maaori you've ever seen  
(or Tama turning me pink like the taniwha waiting for us)  
and you hold me as i crackle with  
that very specific kind of loss  
that comes from opening up your chest  
for someone to take whatever they want  
but they just  
turn away

## **Our mokopuna will outlast the empire**

*after Gustave Doré's The New Zealander*

Our flute blowing and lake swimming mokopuna  
Our tucking and strapping mokopuna  
Our bisexual (cos isn't everyone?) mokopuna  
Our no longer cut back into the binary of gender and sex mokopuna  
Our frizzy haired and black skinned mokopuna  
Our uses NZSL to take the piss at the marae mokopuna  
Our kurii by their side to navigate the world mokopuna  
Our stretch-marked and booty thicc mokopuna  
Our stimming with dice rattle and ring clang mokopuna  
Our only so many spoons but making do mokopuna  
Our mokopuna with the capacity for great healing  
Our mokopuna with the capacity for incredible violence  
Our weaving and carving and writing and singing mokopuna  
Our coding and building and designing a future mokopuna  
Our dancing and laughing and crying and fucking mokopuna  
Our takataapui mokopuna  
    will sit before the crumbling ruins of great men who killed for  
    profit and will make jokes at the expense of all those who have  
    tried and failed to destroy us  
Our will outlast the empire mokopuna



## these bitxhes are shapeshifters

watch a man turn into a woman  
watch a girl turn into a boy  
watch a kid turn into an adult who journalists won't stop saying  
identifies as nonbinary and uses they/them pronouns in parentheticals as barbed as the transphobic  
focus of the media outlet  
watch a spider turn into a different bigger spider that is more poisonous  
yes this is a threat  
watch a mantis turn into a kaiju giant over highways  
yup  
watch as a snake pokes its balls in and out of its own sockets  
like the worlds stupidest game of whack a mole  
softly softly  
do snakes have balls?  
that is a question  
I'm not interested in answering in the least  
the spider spins a web  
the mantis gets an arm trapped in it  
cliff-hanger ending we'll pick up  
if we get renewed  
watch as the slugs out on the deck leave trails for the sunlight to dry up  
watch as a butterfly dies in chrysalis pre-butterfly  
and then a whole army of red ants falls out  
three years later  
you never know what you're turning into until it's happened  
watch two friends egg joke each other into growing wings  
and clucking  
just waddling around pre-flight  
watch a man turn into another man's wife  
an eagle  
any number of different kinds of birds  
a lizard  
watch him become the focus of the poem  
Maui loves to be the centre of attention even in stories where  
shit just ain't about him  
hooking a ride on #transawarenessweek cos  
this bitxh wasn't going to be left out  
of a poem with the word shapeshifter in the title  
watch him get frisky with it  
and radical and violent  
watch him burn every Disney suit to the ground  
for trampling his reputation of being nasty  
fun  
watch watch watch  
Maui get bored of the structure of the poem he's in and demands  
the poem change into something else  
"well what do you want it to change into" the narrator asks the *central* figure of the poem  
"just wait  
and see"  
he says



## **We walk backwards into gender**

*for Michelle Rahurahu*

we joke about putting the wa into waa  
putting the wai into why not?

trying to sus the mathematics of gender  
the trees and skies are one part of the equation  
the seas and soil are another

the veins tangling like roots in our skin  
wrapped around water

i think of how you confuse left and right  
but mauii/matau makes perfect sense

a little navigational gift from your ancestors  
or was it your uncle  
repeating the phrase  
as you got motion sick in a waka

whakapapa as a tree or whakapapa as a rhizome  
bitches we're getting somewhere!

the branches hanging above spread out in infinite directions  
searching for the sun  
till they turn into points in the night sky  
glinting edged scales of a giant fish

i told you about my dream where we cosplayed as stars  
and hung bunting on the walls  
and danced together to music i can't remember  
our dresses swished like a school of tarakihi  
dispersed before a shark  
always swimming forwards  
while we walk backwards through time

we walk backwards into gender  
we joke about putting the waa into waahine  
and spiral outwards from hands gripping tight  
for the fear of a world that  
only understands left and right  
and we spin here together

and we spin

**Jessica Hinerangi**



Māori Mermaid      *Kihi for the Moon*

## In conversation with Jessica Hinerangi

a fine line is delighted to interview Jessica Hinerangi, otherwise known as Māori Mermaid, for our “Art/Mahi Toi” edition. She is a poet and artist with a Masters in ekphrastic poetry and her debut collection *Āria* was released by Auckland University Press earlier this year.

**“I draw moko kauae on my Barbies and then I make them kiss.”**

**Kia ora Jessica, lovely to kōrero. Would you please tell us about your background, where you’re from, your heritage, and who and/or what led you into the world of writing.**

Kia ora! Ko Whakaterere manawa Kaiaia rāua ko Taranaki ōku maunga, Ko Waima Tuhirangi rāua ko Waingongoro ōku awa, Ko Te Mahurehure rāua ko Kanihi-Umutahi ōku hapu, Ko Ngāpuhi rāua ko Ngāruahine rāua ko Ngāti Ruanui ōku iwi, Ko Jessica Hinerangi Thompson Carr toku ingoa. I also whakapapa to Scotland, England, and Norway.

I have always written. As a child I was writing poems about mermaids and horses, and I was drawing my own cover pages for future novels in my little diaries. I would fold printer paper from my mum’s work to make story books and embarrassingly would read them out to classmates thinking I was the next Margaret Mahy. I can’t remember a moment in life when I didn’t want to write. I was always a passionate reader, my favourite places to visit were the public library or any bookshop. I studied English literature and Art History at Otago university and wrote for *Critic*, the uni magazine, during my degree. Between essays and articles I practised poetry and short stories. I’ve always been in this world!

**Congratulations on the publication of your first poetry collection *Āria*. I really enjoyed the variety and nuance of the poetry, the personal, the political, the breadth of this collection about reconnecting with your tūpuna and te ao Māori. We find poems about Barbies, horse girls, Sirens and, of**

**course, mermaids, along with Māori spies slipping ‘tikanga into ... wai,/ and kaupapa into ... kai’. You mix humour alongside fury and fear, long-form prose poems and short-form lyric poems. You have empathy for the colonisers, but you don’t let them off the hook. There is a movement from pōtangotango/darkness-of-the-spirit to manawanui/stout-heartedness – and a generous list of translated words at the back for the non-bilingual readers among us. Can you tell us a little about what inspired this collection, themes you return to, and why you write poetry?**

Thankyou! Reconnection and healing inspired this collection of poetry. After high school I was struck with an identity crisis about my whakapapa. I knew I was Māori but what did that really mean to me? Why did I feel like I wasn’t Māori enough? Where did I stand in my whakapapa? What did I know of my tūpuna? Why were we so far away from our whenua? I worked to re-establish some links that seemed lost (they actually weren’t lost I just felt they were because we were disconnected) in our whānau line, and I set about learning more about our Māoritanga with my mum and sister.

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**‘Where did I stand in my whakapapa? What did I know of my tūpuna? Why were we so far away from our whenua?’**

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It’s a forever thing, and during this experience I wrote poems to make sense of what I was feeling, to vent, and to stay creative. These poems came from a place of mamae at first, because I was in pain for a long time. As I have grown and acquired more knowledge and understanding, my poems also grew. I think they grew into things that reached beyond just the pain. From pain, to protest, to a place of taurite, to a state of existing between.

I write poetry to show this process, and when I had enough poems that made a manuscript, I decided I wanted to make a pukapuka that could tautoko other Māori who felt the same.

I want my poems to awhi and make someone feel less whakamā, and less lonely.

I always return to themes of belonging, identity, nature, water, fluidity, and whakapapa.

***Āria* is split into three sections that relate to your search for meaning, each illustrated with one of your paintings. I'm intrigued by the process you used to go about organising individual poems into sections. How did you arrive at each of the sections? What part did the illustrations play? For example, did the illustrations inspire the sections, or vice versa? Also, how did you enjoy the process compared to the writing of individual poems?**

Each section represents the motions of the reconnection journey that I and many of my whānau and friends have experienced. From that feeling of being in the dark, thinking you are lost and at a loss, to figuring something out and getting really fired up, really angry, maybe taking it too far ... maybe not ... and then coming to a place of feeling steadfast and confident in whakapapa and being.

The sections definitely inspired the illustrations which came after. I originally intended to include many, many more illustrations, but through a process of printing out the first draft and physically laying it out on the floor in front of me in order, I cut a lot out. I didn't want it to feel like an art book more than a poetry book, so I kept the illustrations simple, lined, and true to the themes. I drew the illustrations you see in the pukapuka after the poems were written.

I think I enjoyed writing the individual poems more than the publishing process. I love the natural flow when a single poem pours out, and there are no expectations, no long term plans for it. It's just doing its thing getting onto the page out of the heart, and it might go in a drawer or it might end up in a book one day, who knows. The process of pulling everything together was

exciting but less spontaneous, which was its own kind of fun, but I'm a sucker for that early creative explosion.

**You have a Masters in ekphrastic poetry, which is awesome! Can you tell us more that? What inspired your studies and what relationship do you find between poetry and art? Do you see the processes between art and poetry as similar, complementary or entirely different, and how? Is one or the other easier for you?**

I completed my Masters coursework early 2020. My focus was on Māori Ekphrastic poetry and looking closely at how Māori poets write about toi, art, object, and taonga in a way that is different from Pākehā ekphrastic poetry.

I was inspired by my major in Literature and my minor in Art History coming together, as well as poets I was reading like Jacquie Sturm and Arapera Blank. I saw this cycle between the words on the page and the objects being written about, and fell in love with the exchange. A poem reflecting on a taonga gave something more to the taonga; the taonga was seen as something more than an art piece or a lifeless thing, but as a living, breathing thing. It is a very Māori view. The poets wrote beyond observation; they interacted with the mauri of the works being written about, and thus that mauri can be found in their poems.

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**'A poem reflecting on a taonga gave something more to the taonga; the taonga was seen as something more than an art piece or a lifeless thing, but as a living, breathing thing.'**

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I definitely see the process between art and poetry as similar; I personally cannot have one without the other. They feed each other, they transfer breath between each other. When one gets too hard to work with, I turn to the other, and then back again. It is cyclical.



**“There are no Māori mermaids’ another artist says in my DMs, ‘only marakihau. You’re so colonised.’”**

**As a Māori writer in a colonised country that seems a lot of the time blind to the injustices done to our indigenous people, would you mind speaking to your experience of working in Pākehā-oriented institutions such as the university and the literary and arts worlds?**

In my experience, which has been much more privileged than others due to me being kiritea, universities and literary/art spaces can miss a lot, and hold an alarming lack of cultural competency. Their structures have isolated a lot of my friends and I. Universities tend to undervalue Māori academics, and the overall goals of such institutions rarely align with kaupapa Māori.

Some aspects of the literary/art worlds I have encountered have been very elitist and difficult to work with. But most of what I’ve experienced has been warm because the Māori creative community has really pulled me in and lifted me up. But it’s all about what the values are – when selling and making a big flash name for yourself are the only goals, things get competitive in an unhealthy way, and people can get hurt. When the goal is to uplift each other, purchase from each other, share each other’s mahi, and wānanga with each other, then communities thrive, and that’s the world I want to be a part of.

I don’t know what else I could say to this that is new, but I would recommend the article *Disturbing the Discipline: Reflections on Ngā Kete Mātauranga* written by Dr Tara McAllister for Pantograph Punch, which I feel really speaks to the university experiences of Māori.

**Do you have any suggestions as to how Aotearoa New Zealand and, indeed, journals such as ours might encourage more Māori and Pacific authors to write, publish and be published?**

I think we need more Māori and Pacific editors and writers working in publishing houses and journals. I believe that would encourage and inspire more Māori and Pacific authors to publish. It really does make all the difference having the eyes of your own culture on your words. Māori pick up on details in Māori writing that non-Māori will often miss, and the treatment of our writing as a body of work (living, breathing, with certain whakapapa), is different also.

I do believe more publishing houses and journals should hire more indigenous people and value them, pay them well, and trust them with our stories. It would make for more submissions as well as a healthy, safer environment for all writers.

**What’s next on the horizon? Do you have any new projects you’re working on?**

I am already thinking about my second poetry collection which I’m hoping I will be able to focus on over this summer and next year. I’m letting the poems flow for the moment, hoping they’ll take the shape of something new and fresh in time ... I also would love to work on a novel! But small steps ... it will happen when it happens.

**Tēnā koe, Jess, for sharing some of your kaupapa kupu toi and for our ātaahua Spring edition cover “Kihi for the moon”, which we all adore. Kā mihi nui.**

## Jessica Hinerangi

### Utu

Slip into the water,  
call the atua to practice,  
you are a pulsing piece of  
pounamu ready to be blessed,  
you are the pakiaka of the tree  
raised to trip the hiker,  
a burst of foam  
on the cheek of Hinemoana,  
the space between the embrace  
o tō kuia moko kauae  
you are the huia feather in her hair.  
You are proof of resilience,  
a one in a trillion chance.  
Your gentle voice  
swells the bays  
and the bush,  
sending shivers down crooked  
spines beneath blue collars  
and ironed suits.  
You have no idea  
how afraid of your mana  
they are,  
you are the utu  
they didn't see coming ...



Claire Beynon *The sharp/flat cadences of weather*

## Claire Beynon

### Taonga Pūoro

for Gillian Whitehead

This unsteady place of black water and red kelp insists  
we lay down our tools and listen.

From where I stand, spine to the rope, I catch her  
in the act – eyes closed, head back – undisturbed by silence  
or squall, the sharp/flat cadences of weather.

She's with us on the Breaksea Girl, but music  
is her separate boat.

See how her face is wet with notes,  
her throat a waiting bird. Taonga pūoro surge  
in her chest like waterfalls.

How strange I should remember here a line I read  
long, long ago; *bees in Mykonos hum in a minor chord.*

Here, the scale is unpredictable, the thrum  
that of a sailor's cap, an incidental island, a glissando  
of salt scattering the shadows of dark-bellied fish.

We sail through contrapuntal seas –  
our private charts, our common geography.

Ten artists, yes, and at least as many rocks. But  
in this unsteady place of black water and red kelp  
we do as we must. We lay down our tools and listen.



## Karen Zelas

### Perspective

*Red Jug, c. 1931, Catalogue number FH0891*

she knew a horizon  
when she saw one the edge  
of the world luring  
with light and colour – layers  
of mauves / limes / greys a hint  
of paradise beyond dirt-shades  
of claret & olive one lone  
dead tree trudging  
to the Dali-edge the ambiguous  
foreground: rust-red pitcher full-bodied  
fecund vine leaves on unglazed clay belly  
it argues with infinity unabashed  
says: *here I stand naked*  
beside a Picasso-esque vase of modest  
white lilies – the epitome of beauty in the  
whore’s shadow she regretted  
her own plainness dressed it with flair  
& feather fox & foliage  
second-hand colour & texture  
a living work of  
hardship lilies for purity  
holiness resurrection & birth blooms  
that root in water winding through field  
& ground  
she was a woman firmly rooted  
in a man’s world the ex-pat creative  
trapped by obsession the need to mark  
her own zig-zag path in pursuit of the world  
of her eye a stream of blue cloth  
pitcher on the table  
  
I long to snatch  
that red jug from the frame quench my thirst

To view painting: Google: completefranceshodgkins.com; Search: enter catalogue number - FH0891

## Giles Graham

### **Images from the 1907 Sub-Antarctic Expedition**

Here is the coracle the survivors made  
Here are their bivouacs

And on every side the sepia  
Grasses sweep down hazy hill  
The shoreline blurry, an approaching squall

My hands are cold from holding the shutter  
For one hundred and sixteen years

## **So Real The Birds Come To Peck At Them**

I fall in love  
With lemon halves,  
Tall jugs,  
Stout jugs,  
Reflective tableware,  
Grapes,  
Starched tablecloth,  
Anamorphic skulls,  
Butterflies,  
Seasonal fruit,  
A specific bundle of asparagus.

I issue from the library  
A book that instructs me how  
To draw ellipses and cylinders;  
Drills me through exercises in smudging,  
Hatching, and rows  
Of straight lines.

I am appalled.

I didn't want this,  
Only  
Grapes,  
Tablecloths,  
Glistening and matte jugs,  
Stout gourds,  
Pear flesh,  
Soft light,  
Skulls  
And lemon halves.

## Alastair Clarke

### At John Olson's Memorial Service, Sydney, May 2023

He was tall, grave  
He worked his cheeks like bellows  
his lips pulsing the didgeridoo  
and the long pole sang

and the vast land appeared  
and his right hand fluttered  
like a small bird and tapped  
and birds and lizards all fauna

were close in the room  
and John would have cried A BIG WOW!  
He was tall, grave  
and carried within the great wide land

and gifted it to us  
in the astonished room  
He played sans horizon sans foreground  
like John's seeing beneath his aeroplane

vast horizonless Lake Eyre  
Taking the line for a walk  
such lines of story  
his brush his memory stick

He was tall and grave  
When he spoke he graced silence  
Listen. See me quietly  
Listen ... See ... See ...



## Ariana Tikao



Matahana Tikao Calman, 2014 *The End*

### Head red

the earth shook us awake I fainted outside my young son's door when his high pitched voice was calling his fear towards me in the darkness the shock of knowing that the earth is not solid beneath our feet I thought it was the one thing I could rely upon that the earth was solid but I am being bucked like I was riding an electric bull in a Texan bar only I'm in Ōtautahi and I never knew we had these faults no-one is to blame surely we recalled seeing the word liquefaction in our house documentation where it talked about potential hazards and the lawyer said that was just a formality that it wasn't something likely to occur who the hell knew we had these faults beneath us are they even beneath us or are they in-between are they above are they in us if only we did not build such high brittle buildings they would not have tumbled so destructively they tried to apply terra nullius but what did they think we were as we'd been living here warring here fucking here fishing here hanging up those fish to dry here exploring here cooking here intoning our karakia here bleeding here singing here dying here grieving here for generations upon generations so the whakapapa says so we say so how could they conceive of a right to land that was supposedly unoccupied they need their head read as my dad would say only when I heard him say that I thought he was saying: "they need their head red".

## Emma Neale

### **The Artist**

*a found poem*

She is reminding us  
there is a shifting of power through the body

often we can only guess at the meaning  
becoming, in a number of worlds,

rocks, fish, trees and plants  
new forms of talk

found language sourced from images of book spines in “Keeping it Complex, Keeping it Connected”  
(Emily Floyd exhibition, Dunedin Public Art Gallery)

## Lynda Scott Araya

### Life Portrait

Springtime, and calves nuzzle at my fence,  
rubbery tongues as blue-black as dead lambs too early born,  
that molder and seep in sodden leaves under shaded trees,  
and pink blossom hangs heavy on the wild cherry,  
that sways drunkenly in the wild winds whishing down the valley  
to gouge stony soil from farms.

Worms wind deep tunnels in bulbs' sweet flesh,  
green shoots strike for sun despite it all  
and on my back lawn, a cat divests baby rabbits  
of their winter coats and hangs them out  
to dry.

## Lyndsey Knight

### **the artist is present**

*after Marina Abramovic*

marina is rising in the kitchen  
while the radio plays  
and the kettle boils for tea.  
she is rising  
as saint theresa rose in church  
and once, to her annoyance  
in the kitchen while making soup.  
a gift can also be an obstacle.

we watch her meditate  
make tea  
levitate.

afterwards we joke well,  
she certainly rose  
to the occasion, rose  
to the challenge, rose  
above it all – teapots,  
soup ladles, that critic.  
we are elevated, liberated,  
have found a new link we think,  
between earth and sky.



Marina Abramovic, performance artist: MOMA  
New York 2012

*In homage to Saint Theresa & to happy childhood  
memories spent in a grandmother's kitchen*

## Franciska Soares

### art, the disruptor

an avant-garde i stand different distinct  
in contentious dialogue with  
canonical lexicons of literature

i hope to stay standing and not bend    end  
seated soon  
enough

i hope to fight in flight from formalism  
to a void  
conventionalism    frivolous dilettantism

have i extolled like artists of old the bad  
the banal  
missteps accident mischance  
distanced from epochal pretty  
ritzy revivalisms?

i create art  
it's an urge a surge a language  
and a la Matisse  
a web of intimate liberties  
*deformities* you say *devoid of conventional beauty?*  
that may be  
but that's me



## **J E Blaikie**

### **Hot stuff**

*after Fiona Kidman*

When we are older Cinderella  
will eye the prince, recalling how  
he once stood in a golden light  
(this is not a straight city)

The stepsisters work in the public sector  
and the parents moved to Waikanae –  
prune paradise!

Cinderella will recall the pumpkin,  
the mice and palace life –  
her heart will swell and sigh  
for a once smoking-hot prince  
then resume its usual beat

## Marjory Woodfield

### **Guernica on the Wall of their Apartment**

*after Pablo Picasso*

We arrive in Singapore and the Grays invite us for Thanksgiving. Kathy says Ikea's the place to go for furniture. They have everything. *Look*, she says, *even art for the wall*. On the floor Robbie and Matt squabble over whose Lego piece is whose and Tina sits silent on the couch with Stephen King. The village burns. Flames lick into corners. We set the table.

The boys grumble. They say there's nothing to eat and what's wrong with burgers and chips. Kathy brings out her Pumpkin Pie. *A new recipe*. Fighter planes are machine-gunning women and children. They run into fields to hide.

The boys are sullen. There's foreboding with the first taste. They'd rather have ice-cream. The village, still burning.

## Ruben Mita

### **A Katydid on the Picnic Table at Mutton Cove**

Doctor, EB, Great Britain, RO and DH  
Rachel Riders was here in '17  
So were the JWS (is that you Jehovah?)  
TT, all in Gothic, (in '17 too)  
outlasts the fading scribbles of  
Nino Seal  
The DJS were here then too  
and Moon and Wick  
Was the pūkeko? How old is this fish?  
And who is this, all in spindly green,  
the only silent name,  
climbing the span of the Chilean star  
before the sunrise?

## Brent Cantwell

### **The Market Rallies**

*after 'The Market Rallies' by Jenna Parker*

and when we attend the Market Rallies,  
the market rallies and we all rejoice:  
some come by boat, some by choice  
gathering around fires productively  
building this frame, the flesh and blood  
and oil of the bull embellished  
with perpetual movement demanding demand:  
one – no two cars, big cars, cars to connect  
the suburbs to the city's gas-tank heart,  
where we pump and grunt and snort, and sing

our gospel of gospels, rejoice! Flex muscular  
banners across long-yielding skies and repeat.  
Tweet miracles of strength and capital.  
Reveal the truth of science!  
Drag down the burning effigy of reason  
and leave the embers to the dust and hoof  
of opinion – at last equality!  
Now everyone, everyone has a voice.  
Even the weak cry for strength asserting  
golden horns and 'scrapers that pierce the sky!

O Bull of no ring, you set us free!  
With honest brutality, and some good-  
natured neglect, we heave the obesity  
of Christmas onto our shoulders.  
Despite the burnt-out-car of afterwards,  
despite one billion animals burning,  
the tantrum of the bull doubles down  
a stampeding GDP and more,  
more to protect our individual choice –  
and the market rallies and we all rejoice!

# Margaret Moores

## Waiting

after Gwen John: *Girl Reading at the Window, 1911*

The corner of a room. She leans toward the early morning light glowing through a window. She has pulled aside a long lace curtain and anchored it to a light deal table with a paperback book. Delicate. She wears a black bow on top of her head, dark dress. Her foot is on the seat cushion of a wicker chair. Leather shoe, blue stocking. An awkward pose.

Imagine holding that pose for Rodin while he remakes your naked body in clay. Imagine that you made love in his studio first and your body is soft and open. Imagine waiting all day for him to call. Putting down the book. Letting the curtain fall back onto the glass. Lighting a lamp.

## The world kept away

after Gwen John: *The Brown Tea Pot c. 1915-16*

*Rules to Keep the World away: Do not listen to people (more than is necessary); do not look at people (ditto); have as little intercourse with people as possible ...*

Solitude is a brown teapot with a white cup and saucer, wide mouthed milk jug, and crumpled newspaper on a small round table. Pencils in a jar on the mantelpiece. Book on the stool. You have risen from your chair for a moment and seen how book, cup and saucer, the jar of brushes, lie in a path of light. You have seen how the dark walls, the stool and the mantelpiece are squares and shadows. How the table makes a circle.

You have seen how the teapot glistens.  
Touch it.

The epigraph in this poem comes from *Gwen John: A life* by Sue Roe, Vintage 2002, p. 137.



## Michael Gould

### Trash / Art

It was the early Seventies  
and Andy Warhol's film  
*Trash* was playing at The Art  
a small cinema  
in midtown Manhattan.

The irony was not lost on me  
sitting with my popcorn  
and Coke, and I cite it now  
as an example  
of an early postmodern joke.

### The Art Critic

Sitting and waiting  
for his life to begin  
like Rodin's *The Thinker*  
right hand under chin  
sitting and waiting  
for his life to start  
he's been known  
to diss some friends  
and doesn't hesitate  
to dismiss bad art.

## Kit Willett

### Dear Artist

How abstract can a pear be  
before April comes?

You have here a tapestry  
of essences, but I wonder  
about the still life that lies  
behind it.

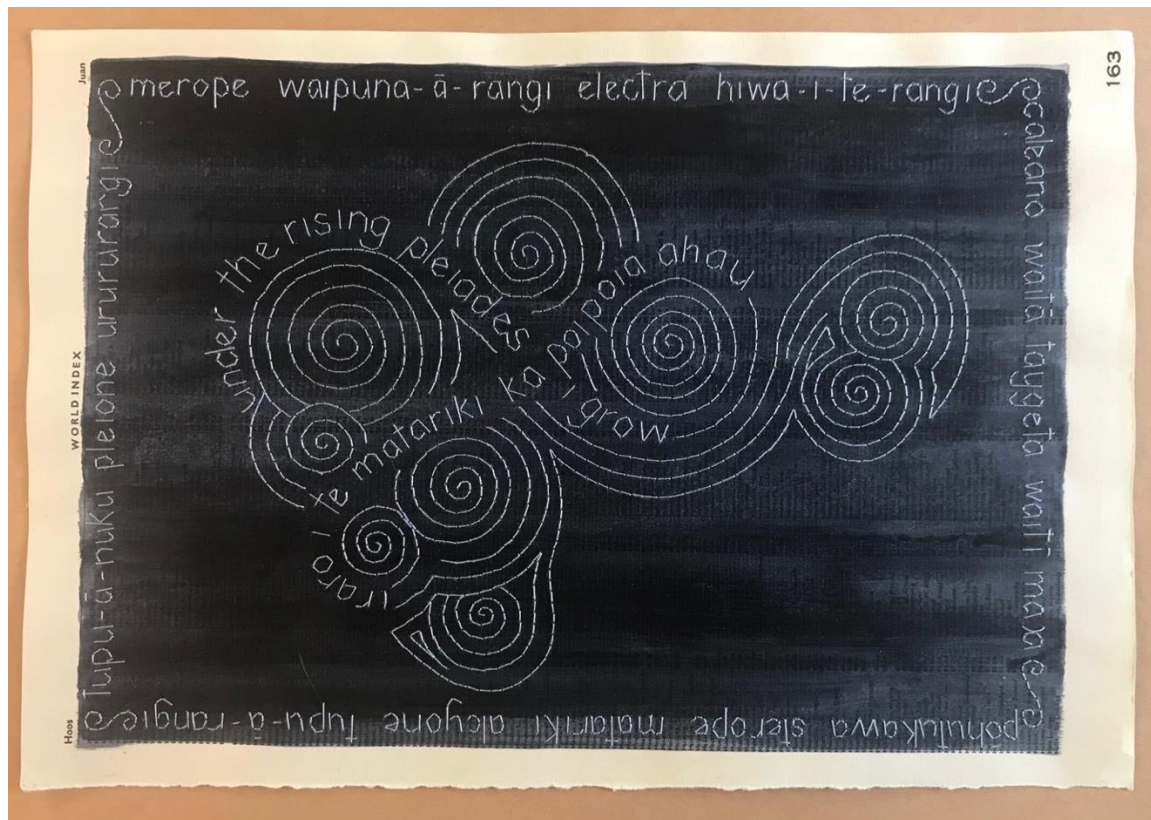
They say that it is only  
through the stripping back,  
the tearing and throwing  
over the shoulder, the manic  
and awful ripping of canvas,  
that you find the shapes

underneath. But, how abstract  
is the table that takes the apple  
centre stage? It reduces to a syrup—  
a search for isolation when feeling  
unknowable—boiled until sticky.

What are you hiding behind  
your clear messaging?

There is no going home now;  
you must bring home to me in oil.  
Do not let yourself withdraw;  
it leads you to a fantasy world.  
Come back home to me, James.  
Come back to your cubed houses  
and fruits.

# tracey sullivan



tracey sullivan *as if they were the currents that flow around themselves*  
mixed media: hand-stitching on salvaged atlas page, acrylic



## Sarah Scott

### ***Harlequin's Carnival* by Joan Miró**

From Old French *Herlequin* –  
a character who carries a magic  
wand, like the gypsy in the Suzanne Vega  
song that makes me long for nights in my own  
place with wooden floors & a crate  
listening to the little rivered  
guitar of her voice, wondering about  
love. Did I think it was inside the music?  
Things come slow, says Joan Miro, as  
though artworks were plants and everything  
was privately growing out of the ground. In this painting we  
smoke in the grim winter light, under  
a black-ramped rayon sun, the Gloriosa Lily's  
tender flames approaching.



## Philomena Johnson

### **Not Everything Turns Away**

I walk  
the path  
along the cliff  
as birds  
dive  
towards the sea  
like Icarus

ah, Master Bruegel

these sheep  
have eyes  
these trees a portion  
of attention

and I have seen oxen  
whose presence thrums

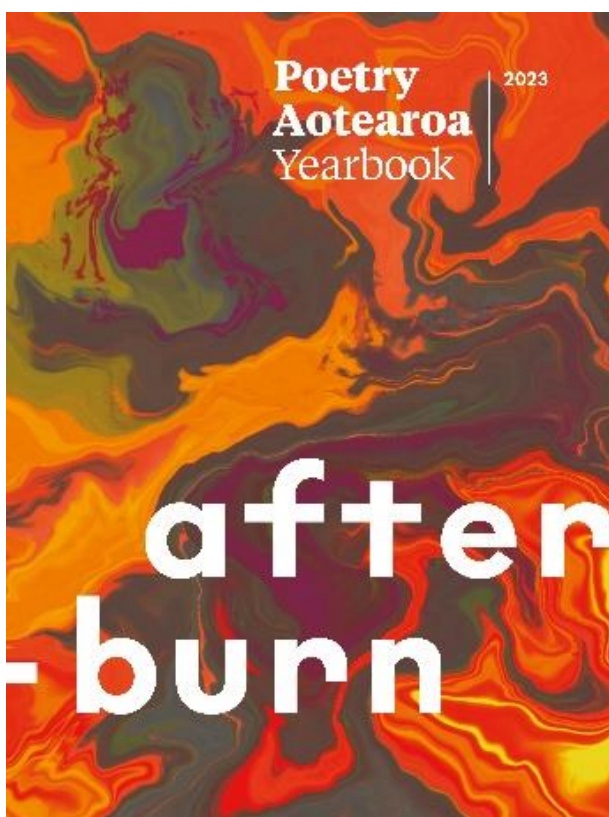
did you not capture  
these invisibles  
in your painting?

You saw them  
I know you did  
seconds before  
or after  
the paint was dry.

### Heidi North

***Poetry Aotearoa Yearbook 2023:  
afterburn — Ed. Tracey Slaughter***

(Massey: Massey University Press, 2023)  
ISBN 9781991016355. RRP \$37.00. 392 pp.



Poetry can haul us from our collective weariness, the bitter ashes of the pandemic, and strike a match in the darkness. Sculpted by the insightful editorial eye of Dr Tracey Slaughter, each poem in *Poetry Aotearoa Yearbook 2023: afterburn* is a spark.

The annual yearbook is the country's longest running poetry anthology. Formerly *Poetry New*

*Zealand* – the title was updated this year to better reflect our national identity – it's an essential piece of our literary landscape, a time capsule that captures the zeitgeist of poetry that emerged during a given year in Aotearoa.

Every day I point at something and ask how long  
has that been there and you always say forever.  
(Jane Arthur, "The sky is bigger")

It might be an institution but this year's yearbook, with its cover scorched by flames, is anything but staid. Slaughter notes that she had riches to select from, well over 1000 submissions, a sign that poetry is alive and well across the motu. The 110 poems that made it into *after-burn* have sharp teeth and are 'beautiful, urgent, fierce' (Michele Powles, "There you are, dancing").

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'The 110 poems that made it into *after-burn* have sharp teeth and are 'beautiful, urgent, fierce''

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The voices in *Poetry Aotearoa Yearbook 2023: afterburn* are wide ranging, with well-known poets and emerging poets, a range of diversity in background and age, a section of essays, and a rewarding section of reviews of recent New Zealand poetry collections. Slaughter describes her editorial intent in this year's yearbook as crafting 'a space where a whole spectrum of poets can deeply connect with each other's work, offering intense, wide-ranging concentration to all the sounds, skins, sources that sustain our collective song.'<sup>1</sup> No mean feat

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<sup>1</sup> From a Q and A with Dr Tracey Slaughter:  
<https://www.read-nz.org/news/article/after-burn-poetry-aotearoa-yearbook-2023-q-a-with-dr-tracey-slaughter>

but through astute curation, the poems bounce off each other, and the collection thrums with a magnetic, compelling power.

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**'The yearbook's title *afterburn* is a refrain, a metallic taste in our mouths as the poems ask us to grapple with thorny questions.'**

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The yearbook's title *afterburn* is a refrain, a metallic taste in our mouths as the poems ask us to grapple with thorny questions. In her introduction, Slaughter describes each poem as an 'encounter.' The poems are tender, painful, bleak, joyful, but they are not passive.

I cup this moment in my hands like a  
small secret fire. It remains despite  
everything else.

(Lily Holloway, "Part-lament for the girl who  
dreamt she was a hermit crab")

Featured poet Tyla Harry Bidois, a Jewish poet, author, illustrator and musician, kicks *afterburn* off with a series of vivid, electrifying poems, signposting the way the whole collection will grip us and not let go. The poems pulse, seeming to whisper, look at us, we may be bloodied and broken, world weary, but we are unquestionably alive.

Following the poems there is an interview with Bidois in which she describes her intent in writing, the longing and potential of poetry as 'one of the best places to explore the impact and potential of human connection.'

Here are a couple of dazzling soundbites:

If I can't love you without hurting you, would  
I live in you  
like a wound

(Tyla Harry Bidois, "Teeth")  
And

everything is the envelopment  
of stars dying, alive;  
we explode into each other.

(Tyla Harry Bidois, "Darling")

The strongest poems in the rest of the collection continue to fly like shards of light in the darkness. John Allison's five-year-old child in "How to Sing Sunlight" comments:

Sunlight is so hard to catch, she says  
But it catches everything in the whole wide  
world

The cumulative result of reading this collection feels as though it is inching us towards a truer sense of being alive. Demanding over and over again that we 'wonder what we had to lose' (Rebecca Ball, "spaces fill silver").

It serves as a poetic stock-take of where we are as a country, emerging battle worn post-pandemic, grappling with the climate emergency, and is a call to action to participate loudly in the joyful, painful world around us.

In a life that shines: the moon, a star,  
you speak of the thin edge of existence

(Michele Powles, "There you are, dancing")

Chantelle Xiong could be speaking for all the poems in *Poetry Aotearoa Yearbook 2023: after-burn* when her poem, "Aged", finishes the collection by asking in the very last line:

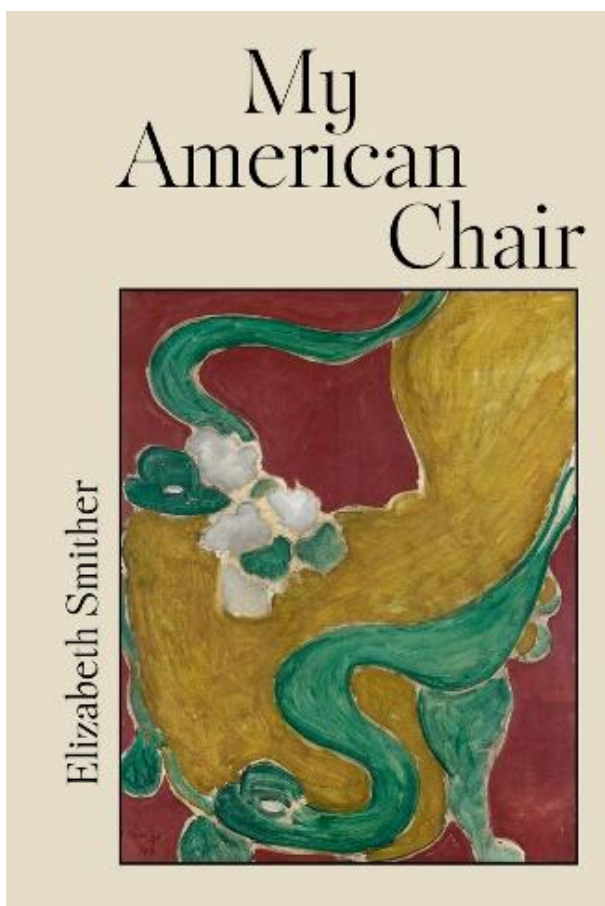
Have I lit a fire?

To review books for *a fine line*,  
please contact Erica Stretton,  
reviews@poetrysociety.org.nz

## Trevor Landers

### *My American Chair – Elizabeth Smither*

(Auckland: Auckland University Press. 2022)



Reading a new Elizabeth Smither collection is always a source of anticipation and relish. *My American Chair* is her eighteenth poetry collection and marks her as an international poet unfettered by geographical or thematic borders.

Smither's great achievement is her ability to transform quotidian moments into monumental events. She has a talent for acute observation, piquant reflections and the guile to make the seemingly inconsequential imminent and alive with possibility. In this collection, there are picaresque anecdotes fashioned from the mundane, traveller's tales casting her light on

what it means to be a traveller, and the continued reification of the domestic, which elevates the text to points of reflection and wonder. Poems like "Chimney Smoke" (p.5), "Overgrown Rockery" (p.13), "The Little Girl" (p.25) are emblematic of this approach, which is well encapsulated in "Brushing a Child's Hair" (p.31):

thinking of the first tentative stroke from  
hairline to the neck, the beginning of anything.

How pure it is, like any journey:  
the first turn of the wheel, the raising of a  
blind, the first sleep-swathed morning kiss.

---

'Smither's impact resides in her uncanny ability to make observations about the strangeness and quirkiness of human existence and to elevate these for the delectation of her readers.'

---

Smither's impact resides in her uncanny ability to make observations about the strangeness and quirkiness of human existence and to elevate these for the delectation of her readers. Her use of counterpoint and contrast compels readers to re-examine these scenes with fresh eyes. Characteristically, it is imbued with warmth, panache, finesse and striking imagery.

Partisanship and parochialism can be a trap for New Zealand poets, but it's one that Smither deftly avoids. This collection reaffirms we are people of the world, and our voices have something profound to say in the international arena. Often this is rendering domestic encounters with a kind of universal truth which are offered as a gift to the dedicated reader. Her poem, "American Grass" (p.36) captures her ability to find the magical and memorable in the familiar and the ordinary:

It can touch the ankles of a barefoot child  
you can lie on it and have some shelter  
not a fortress but a caress.

---

‘This collection reaffirms we are people  
of the world, and our voices have  
something profound to say in the  
international arena.’

---

Smither is renowned for her epistolic skill, and this treasury interweaves that with iconic imagery and a funny, poignant and personal voice. Her vision remains undimmed, and her capacity to lift the ordinary and otherwise invisible into our sight line is a major achievement of this volume. The volume traverses Paris, London, the United States and Taranaki too, with equal aplomb. *My American Chair* crosses neighbourhood, emotional terrains and landscapes like a buffet of splendid poetical writing. What lingers is the elevation of the simple acts, exchanges and encounters which enrich our lives, and Smither assiduously captures these and invites us to reflect further upon them. The imbrication of story, emotion, image and elan which thread throughout the work makes for a very memorable read indeed. Take for example, “Hip Replacement Surgery” (p.70):

Something like a door handle or a runcible  
spoon  
shines bright as a solid ghost on the screen  
while flesh, the little that surrounds becomes a  
blur.  
How much I prefer my silver joint.

Elizabeth Smither’s poetry lingers in the  
imagination because it is both rich and yet

economical. She combines telling insights with a dexterity and seeming simplicity that encourages readers to savour the lines as morsels, rather than running onward into the next line. Her poems are like origami – they often appear simple and unbeguiling but are in fact fabricated so cleverly they demand lingering reflections.

She glides gracefully from moment to experience, from past to present, with the curiosity of a scientist. A number of poems sing songs of encomium to friends and family, sometimes as moving eulogies, sometimes drawing a family member closer. To me this is amongst her strongest writing, such as in “Little Boy on the Lower Bunk” (p.26):

I see the windowsill with its figurines and toys.  
She the dark sky and the stars and moon.  
I hear the rain, she sees the silver spears.

This is a book for lazy afternoon meditations, and as it proved for me, the perfect companion on long haul travel. Those who delve in and dwell in its pages can expect a most pleasurable dividend.

To review books for *a fine line*,  
please contact Erica Stretton,  
reviews@poetrysociety.org.nz



We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Windrift Haiku Group. Their generous donation to the NZPS will support ongoing haiku projects, such as this haiku feature in *a fine line*.



Michelle Levy *Ancestral Landscapes*

## Denise Hart

country frost  
powders fence posts –  
watercolours

## Julie Adamson

their eyes follow me  
to and fro  
a portrait of my cats

shades of Vermeer  
between the clouds

## Debbie Strange

earth day  
the shimmering wave  
of a bee colony

2<sup>nd</sup> Place, 2020 World Haiku Save our World Competition

## Heather Lurie

searching  
for the perfect piece of sky  
jigsaw puzzle

## Sue Courtney

art class  
sunshine spills onto  
my hands

darkening sky  
a blackbird flies under  
a rose bush

*after Frida Kahlo's "Tree of Hope, Remain Firm"*

Previously published *Haiku Dialogue* (The Haiku Foundation, February 2022)

third day  
a scent of truffle  
in the afterglow

*after Hieronymus Bosch's "The Garden of Earthly Delights"*

Previously published *Haiku Dialogue* (The Haiku Foundation, January 2022)

## Lincoln Jaques

after midnight  
Indigo Girls on vinyl  
silence between tracks

*after 80s Band Indigo Girls*

## Nola Borrell

crowded bus  
an empty seat beside  
the roughsleeper

## Ruby Appleby

coffee date –  
he doodles a rose  
on her napkin

## Jenny Fraser

airing our thoughts a branching eucalypt

## Anne Curran

family portrait –  
a stubborn glint  
in his baby blue eyes

## Laurel Astle

Russell Drysdale exhibition  
gazing at *The Drover's Wife*  
she sighs

barefoot, toes splayed  
she plays Schubert's  
*Impromptu*

The Archibald  
our reflection  
in every portrait





Lydia Draper, after an original artist, unknown *Ko wai au*

**Julie Adamson** lives in Wellington by the sea, always changing and inspiring her. She has been published in *Kokako*, *Island Writer* (Canada) NZPS Anthology 2020 and *a fine line*.

**Ruby Appleby** lives in Auckland, has been published in *Starling* and *Flash Frontier*, and placed third in the Year 13 division of the 2023 *Poetry Aotearoa Yearbook* Student Poetry Competition.

**Laurel Astle** is a retired Primary teacher. She is a member of the haiku group *The Cloud catchers*.

**Claire Beynon** lives in Ōtepoti Dunedin. Her poetry, flash and short stories have been widely anthologized in NZ and abroad. Her second collection, a poetic memoir, is forthcoming (The Cuba Press, 2024). [www.clairebeynon.com](http://www.clairebeynon.com)

**J E Blaikie** is a Wellington writer and editor who has had one collection of poetry published with Steele Roberts.

**Nola Borrell** writes haiku, tanka, and haibun in particular. Her work is widely published here and overseas.

**Brent Cantwell** has recently been published in *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Poetry NZ*, *Landfall*, and *Takahe* and is looking forward to his first poetry collection *tether* being published in 2023.

**Alastair Clarke** is a New Zealand writer. Most recently work has appeared in *Antipodes* (US), *Landfall*, *Poetry New Zealand*, *Fresh Ink*, *Orbis* (UK) and in *Ezine*.

**Sue Courtney** lives by the estuary in Ōrewa where much of her inspiration comes. She co-organised Haiku Down Under in 2022 and was the catalyst for the session, 'A Showcase of Haiku from Aotearoa presented in English and Te Reo Māori', with te reo translations by Vaughan Rapatahana.

**Anne Curran** writes haiku inspired by the landscape, seasons, people, and events of Hamilton. She remains grateful to writing friends, mentors, and family members who nurture this hobby.

**Lydia Draper** is a Victoria University graduate of English Literature based in Waipū, Te Tai Tokerau. She is studying part-time at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. Her poetry has been published in *Fast Fibres Poetry*.

Born in the Waikato, **Jenny Fraser**, nature lover, musician, artist and poet, now lives in Mt Maunganui. Her haiku, senryu, tanka, haiga and haibun are published in New Zealand and International Journals.

**Michael Gould** was awarded a mentorship in 2021 by the New Zealand Society of Authors, completing it with then poet laureate David Eggleton. Writing poetry and vispo since the mid-Seventies, he entered the arena only after retirement.

**Giles Graham** is a poet and father living in Ōtepoti with his family.

**Denise Hart** lives in heartland Hawkes Bay, nestled close to the Ruahine Ranges. She enjoys the expression of haiku inspired from her rural everyday activities.

**Jessica Hinerangi** is a multi-media cyclical creative. She works primarily in digital illustration, poetry, fiction, and whenua pigment painting, often under the name Māori Mermaid. She has her Masters from Otago University, and has been published in *Landfall*, *Starling*, and *Pantograph Punch*. Jessica's first book of poetry *Ária* was published in 2023 with Auckland University Press.

**Lincoln Jaques**'s poetry, fiction and travel essays have appeared in Aotearoa and internationally. He was the runner-up in the 2022 IWW Kathleen Grattan Prize for a Sequence of Poems.

**Philomena Johnson** has had poems appear in *The Quick Brown Dog*, *The London Grip*, *takahē*, *Fuego* and *broken lines / in charcoal*. Philomena is currently a tutor to young writers.

**Lyndsey Knight** lives in Tāmaki Makaurau playing in the dharma with textile art, printmaking and poetry. Her work has been published in *Landfall*, *Listener*, NZPS Anthology, *The Landing Press* etc.

**Trevor M Landers** published his first poem at age five. These days he is the editor of *Mātātuhi Taranaki: A regional bilingual journal of literature* for Taranaki and the diaspora from the province.

**Michelle Levy** (Waikato, Ngāti Mahuta) is a researcher, writer, poet and artist living in Whāingaroa / Raglan.

**Heather Lurie** grew up in America and has lived in New Zealand for 16 years. She has always loved haiku, and relatively recently discovered she loves writing haiku as well.

**Ruben Mita** is a poet, musician and ecology student in Pōneke. He has been published in multiple outlets and won the 2022 Story Inc. IIML Poetry Prize. He likes fungi, fires and some noises.

**Margaret Moores** lives in Tāmaki Makaurau. She has a PhD in Creative Writing from Massey University, and her work has been published in journals and anthologies in New Zealand and Australia.



**Emma Neale** is based in Dunedin/Ōtepoti. She has had 13 books published, and in 2020 received the Lauris Edmond Memorial Award for a Distinguished Contribution to New Zealand Poetry.

**Heidi North** won an Irish poetry award in 2007, leading to her debut *Possibility of Flight* (2015). A poem from her second collection *We are tiny beneath the light* (2019) was used in U2's Australasian tour.

**essa may ranapiri** (Waikato-Tainui, Ngaati Raukawa, Te Arawa, Ngaati Puukeko, Clan Gunn, Horwood) is a person who lives on Ngaati Wairere whenua. Author of *ransack* and *ECHIDNA*. They have a great love for language, LAND BACK and hot chips. They will write until they're dead.

**Sarah Scott's** poetry has been published in *Best New Zealand Poems/Ōrongohau*, NZ Poetry Shelf and *Landfall*. She has an MA in Creative Writing from the IIML and recently she curated the Poetry Lightbox Series in Te Whanganui-a-Tara, where she lives with her husband and two sons.

**Lynda Scott Araya** is a writer and teacher living in Kurow, North Otago. She writes poetry, short fiction and creative non-fiction, and has written a yet-to-be published poetic memoir.

*quiet enough* is **Franciska Soares'** first published collection of poems. Other publications include literary fiction novels available in paperback and ebook formats: *They Whisper in My Blood* and *A Smatter of Minutes*.

**Debbie Strange** is a chronically ill short-form poet, haiga artist and photographer whose creative passions connect her more closely to the world and to herself. Please visit her archive: [debbiemstrange.blogspot.com](http://debbiemstrange.blogspot.com)

**tracey sullivan** is a poet and visual artist. She lives and works on Waiheke Island.

**Ariana Tikao** is a writer and musician based in Ōtautahi. Her work is inspired by her Kāi Tahu ancestors and mana wahine. She became a New Zealand Arts Laureate in 2020.

**Kit Willett** is an Auckland-based English teacher, poet, and executive editor of the Aotearoa poetry journal *Tarot*.

**Marjory Woodfield** is the recipient of awards for poetry, including the *Robert Burns Competition*, *Heritage Poetry Competition*, *NZFF Micro Madness Competition*. She has work pending publication with *erbacce press*.

**Karen Zelas** is an Ōtautahi / Christchurch writer of poetry, novels and drama; the author of five books of poetry, the most recent *Threads* (Pūkeko Publications, 2022).