

Art New Zealand

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Julia Morison

Freedom Farmers / Len Lye / Hotere Culbert

Harry Wong / Jude Rae / Séraphine Pick

Kate Newby / Dane Mitchell / The Crystal Chain Gang

Russ Flatt / Masculinity in Performance Art

John Panting / Dennis K. Turner

Greer Twiss / Barry Cleavin



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COVER ILLUSTRATION: Julia Morison, in front of *Tree Houses for Swamp Dwellers*, Christchurch 2013
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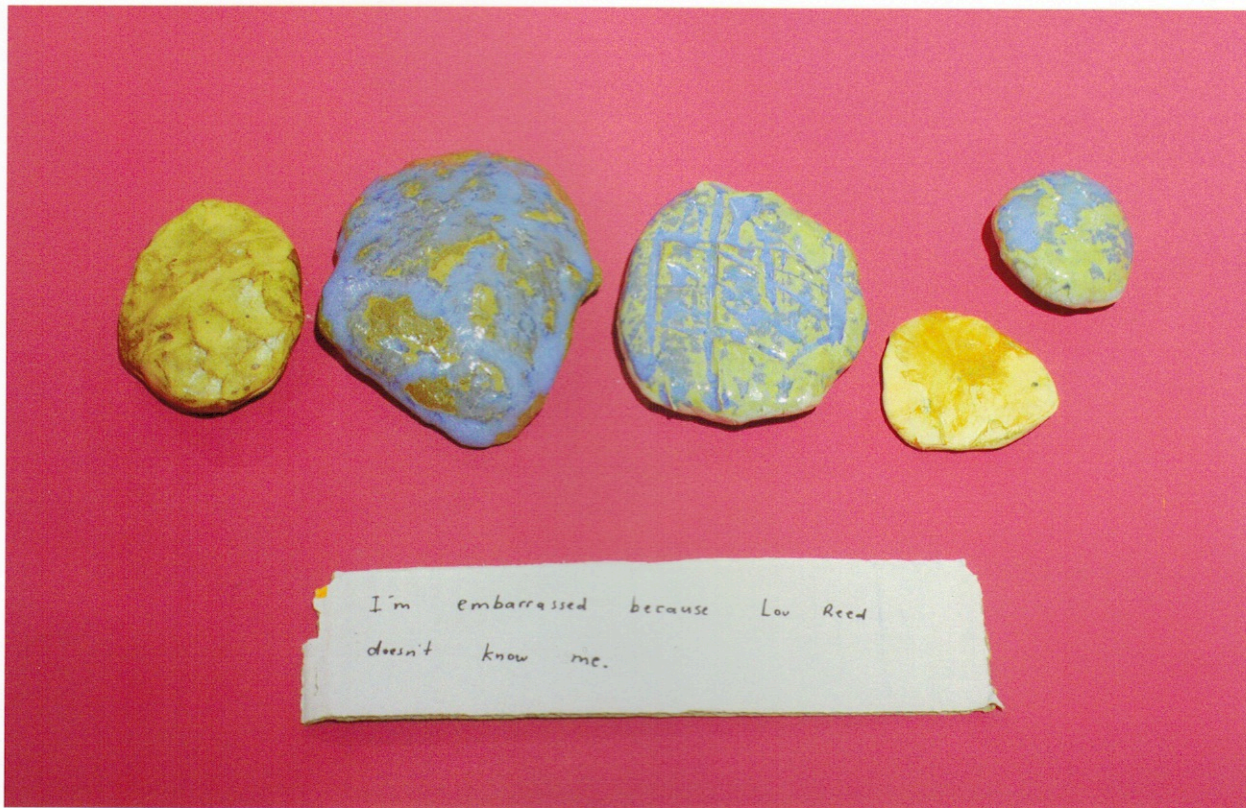
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Belgium Rocks

Kate Newby's Residence in Brussels

DAN MUNN

Kate Newby installed *Maybe I won't go to sleep at all* on all four floors of La Loge during a five-week residency in the Northern autumn of 2013. The gallery is based in a former Freemason house commissioned by the international obedience Le Droit Humain in 1934 and used by the group until 1976. Newby's work is at once a response to this architecture, a continuation of residency-based projects over the last few years, and a mining of the social and emotional content of her few short weeks in Brussels. Each floor showcases a specific body of work, leading the viewer through a series of concerns from basement to rooftop.

In the basement there is a plywood platform painted bright pink-red; on it are laid just over 500 unique ceramic sculptures (which the artist calls 'rocks'), all produced in the space of two days. During their formation the pieces picked up a variety of hand and finger marks; one set was textured by being thrown against the gallery's wooden floor. Grouped by colour, size and style, each set is labelled with a phrase such as 'Do more with your feeling', 'I'm just like a pile of leaves', 'Depend upon it', and 'I'm embarrassed because Lou Reed doesn't know me'.¹ The lines are copied from the artist's notebooks; there are names, imperatives to act (ambitiously!), fragments from personal conversations in Brussels, and lines from Frank O'Hara's *Lunch Poems* (1964).

This method of linking phrase and form in varyingly straightforward and abstract instances brings to mind sentiment analysis in social media. This is a growing area in which affective data in feedback posted on social media websites—likes, comments and soon, latent webcam feeds²—is moulded into a form to which businesses can offer a product or service. How are you feeling today? The nonlinear yet loosely diaristic³ nature of the phrases excavates the social and emotional content of free time, employing it for production as O'Hara does his lunch hour. This new seductive periphery of productive time, a key source of the work's openness and generosity, may also be a woefully precarious position; the exhibition title referring equally to ambition and exhaustion.

In a recent article in *The New Inquiry* the 'land of nod' is presented as the final frontier of the labour market.⁴ It foresees the 24/7 end-game, where time that is not 'work time, consumption time, or marketing time'⁵ loses relevance, as in the reality television show *Shattered*, in which the winner lasted 179 sleepless hours.

On the ground floor, propping open the doors of the temple,⁶ Newby has installed a rough concrete mound. The piece's pallid yellow wash clashes with the natural brown of the wooden floor, making manifest its loosely simulative nature. Like her ceramic rocks, this mound places the deep time of

rock formation alongside what novelist Jennifer Kabat refers to as 'the temporal space of Kate',⁷ the comparatively minuscule moment of production. In doing so we approach the perspective that Timothy Morton writes of in *Ecology without nature*; a non-anthropocentric view in which our own processes are placed alongside the myriad others present within that 'something called Nature.'

On the stairs to the next level a series of warmly amateur photographs is hung as billposters. The images show the artist's friends and colleagues skimming her ceramic rocks across various bodies of water: a swimming pool, a lake in a city park, in a puddle downtown, and in the ocean (good luck). The performatively produced⁸ object is turned back into an event, the sculpture lost forever in the process. The process speaks to land art and particularly the projects of Andy Goldsworthy in which temporary structures composed and conducted in isolated locations are delivered back to the big smoke as permanent photographic works. Perhaps the spoken anecdotes⁹ that naturally develop around the performative elements of the artist's work are in this case the more appropriate record. Unlike the photographs, which adhere to a documentary aesthetic, these anecdotes are told in the perspective and voice of the viewer and have a greater capacity to take on board the range of subjectivities brought to the event.

In the temple a loose weave cotton sheet divides the height of the space in two, on top of which sit two panels of sunny yellow oxide-dyed silk. The cotton was laid on top of the building during the production period and carries the marks of weather

and sneaker treads. Like the silk panels it points to an escape from the lodge's architecturally discrete and previously covert heart. The fabric forms a veiling mechanism against the gaze from the claustra (i.e. one-way viewing window) on the second floor, which during Freemason occupation would have been used for monitoring the activities within the hall. The French term 'Loge', used to refer to a masonic lodge, can also indicate a caretaker's dwelling, a theatre box, or an actor's dressing room; each space playing host to drastically distinct norms of engagement. By disrupting the surveillance of the claustra, the installation also antagonises the typical organisation of the visual within the white cube. One of the most complete views of the space, in which the warm yellow panels of silk are aligned with the illuminated sun, moon and star wall lights behind, is from the toilets upstairs.

In Jacques Tati's 1958 film *Mon Oncle*, the protagonist's world is divided into modernist and vernacular architecture and urban design. Much of the humour arises from his attempts to navigate the impersonal spaces of the modern house and factory. At the very end of the film an estranged father reconnects with his son by taking part in a petty prank; through this brief engagement with uncertainty he forms a vital connection. In the same way this installation subtly but consistently questions the conventions of navigating an exhibition. Entering the temple one must decide whether one is comfortable climbing over the sculpture at the door. The chance-influenced form of this fixture covers almost completely the stylised tool iconography within a Square and Compasses¹⁰ tile mosaic. Similarly, when the temple was constructed to ideal proportions it unintentionally produced, on each





floor, a wedge of leftover space. On the second floor in this area Newby has scrawled the words, 'Oh hi' in chalk on an industrial blue carpet, greeting the chance architectural development as a pleasant surprise.

On the top floor a ceramic wind-chime is strung through the space and out across the roof terrace. The tensioned line passes straight through a hole drilled in the thick concrete wall and is attached to the exterior of the building at each end. Neatly scattered on either side of the window to the terrace are an

assortment of found and silver-cast pocket detritus; matches, cigarette filters, soda can tabs, coins, and wads of paper. This series began during an exhibition at Wellington City Gallery in 2011 in which staff chose pieces to carry around. At the end 'a lot were missing, some were never returned, and some were tarnished' which the artist gladly accepted, saying 'I just wanted the works to circulate and be out living a life in the world'.¹¹ In her public conversation at the gallery with curator Laura Preston, Newby mentioned that she



wonders if things 'get taken for granted when they are permanent'. These silver accessories, paradoxically concealed within the holder's pocket, accentuate the event of viewing, the pocket echoing the withdrawal allowed by the cotton veil in the temple.

One final work visible from the top floor is a flag hanging from an apartment across the street. Produced during Newby's Bachelors degree, it bears the handwritten phrase 'I think I'm doing it in a really interesting way'. Following the dissolving of the British bank Lloyds TSB this year, *The Economist* wrote that it was strange that TSB would keep its 213 year-old name, noting (post-recession) the evolution of customer trust tending towards 'informal brand names [that] reflect more integrity and honesty than stuffy, impassive legacy ones'.¹² In contrast, Newby's 'I think' works to develop our trust in the art institution's potential. In her candidly informal way of working on the periphery of the art object and within the wider physical and historical context of the exhibition space, she asks us to trust in art's capacity for openness, expansiveness, and ultimately, relevance.



1. This phrase was written several months before the songwriter's passing, as many visitors to the show have been curious to know.
2. 'IRENE is a facial expression based mood detection model that has been developed by capturing images while [social network] users use webcam supported laptops or mobile phones. This image will be analysed to classify one of several moods. This mood information will be shared in the user profile . . . several activities and events will also be generated based on the identified mood.' From the abstract for 'IRENE: Context aware mood sharing for social network' a paper presented at the 2011 IEEE International Conference on Service-Oriented Computing and Applications by Haque, M.M., Adibuzzaman, M., Polyak, D., Jain, N.; Ahamed, S.I. and Lin Liu.
3. Newby writes in *Let the other thing in* that 'The energy I had on a particular day (depending on how my day had gone, what I had eaten, exercise, what sort of music I was listening to, etc.) is quite evident in the work. Some sets of stones are larger and more angular—they look like I had run out of patience—whereas other days resulted in fine, detailed sets of tiny pebbles with subtly varied glazes. It was a curious way to document a six month period—in clay sticks and stones.' See Kate Newby *Let the other thing in*, Fogo Island Arts and Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2013.
4. Erwin Montgomery and Christine Baumgarthuber, 'My Soul to Keep', *The New Inquiry*, 15 October 2013.
5. 24/7: *Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* by Jonathan Crary, cited in 'My Soul to Keep' (details above).
6. The term by which the Freemasons referred to the main hall, and which is also used by the gallery staff.
7. Kate Newby, op.cit.
8. This set of rocks is labelled 'Skimming stones formed by clapping hands'.
9. As employed by Tino Seghal in his work *These associations* in the Tate Turbine Hall this past summer. The Tate website notes that the artist 'has risen to prominence for his innovative works which consist purely of live encounters between people'. For the duration of the exhibition the space was 'inhabited by an assembly of participants whose choreographed actions use movement, sound, and conversation'.
10. The Square and Compasses is the single most identifiable symbol of Freemasonry.
11. Right now a set of these objects is taking two months to travel from New Zealand to Munich for an exhibition. The artist has 'no idea' who is carrying these, stating 'it's more just the movement that I like.' A further edition of ten sets of these objects titled *I cross the road all the time* is available from the gallery.
12. W.B., 'Corporate Names, Verbal Identities', *The Economist*, 18 September 2013.

