

Art collector alert: Here are five Kiwi artists who are going places

Art writer Warwick Brown picks some of his favourite up-and-coming Kiwi artists.



A detail from an untitled 2015 work in the University of Auckland collection, by Claudia Jowitt.

CLAUDIA JOWITT

Cake decoration as art? Yeah, right. Actually, yes, absolutely – when we're talking about the paintings of Claudia Jowitt. She has appropriated the masculine painting aesthetic of the iconic 1950s abstract expressionist Jackson Pollock and feminised it. Instead of dramatic dribbles and drips we get controlled icing-bag extrusions. Instead of explosive splashes we have

exquisitely handled tendrils and dollops of paint, smoothed into petals with a palette knife. Instead of bold colours we see the delicate shades of birds' eggs, the subtle tones of old ice and new flower buds. However, toughness lurks beneath Jowitt's seductive surfaces. Raw linen canvas appears between the uncompromising, multidirectional smears of paint that form the background to each work. It's like looking at an iced cake where the icer has gone berserk on the job and the cake is showing through. It's delicate but demanding, cool but hot. Some of the best painting you're likely to see in 2016.



Bondi was the Best Place to be a Mermaid, by Grace Wright.

GRACE WRIGHT

There was a time when abstract expressionist painting was completely out of fashion. So much of it had been done around the world that the style seemed exhausted. Grace Wright is one of a number of young New Zealand artists who are giving gestural painting a new lease of life. Anyone can splash paint around – the challenge is to make art, not a mess.

Wright's sure sense of colour and confident command of her brushes result in paintings that are strong yet seductive, energetic yet balanced and dramatic yet restrained. Everything seems fresh and immediate, not worked over.

There is a real sense of depth, drawing you into a tangled wonderland of luscious, organic forms flowing sensually around each other. Both the exterior and interior of the human body are hinted at. Passionate bold colours, applied

in dramatic sweeps, are held in tension by grey and sombre tones. These attributes give Wright's work great staying power, engaging the eye afresh at every viewing.

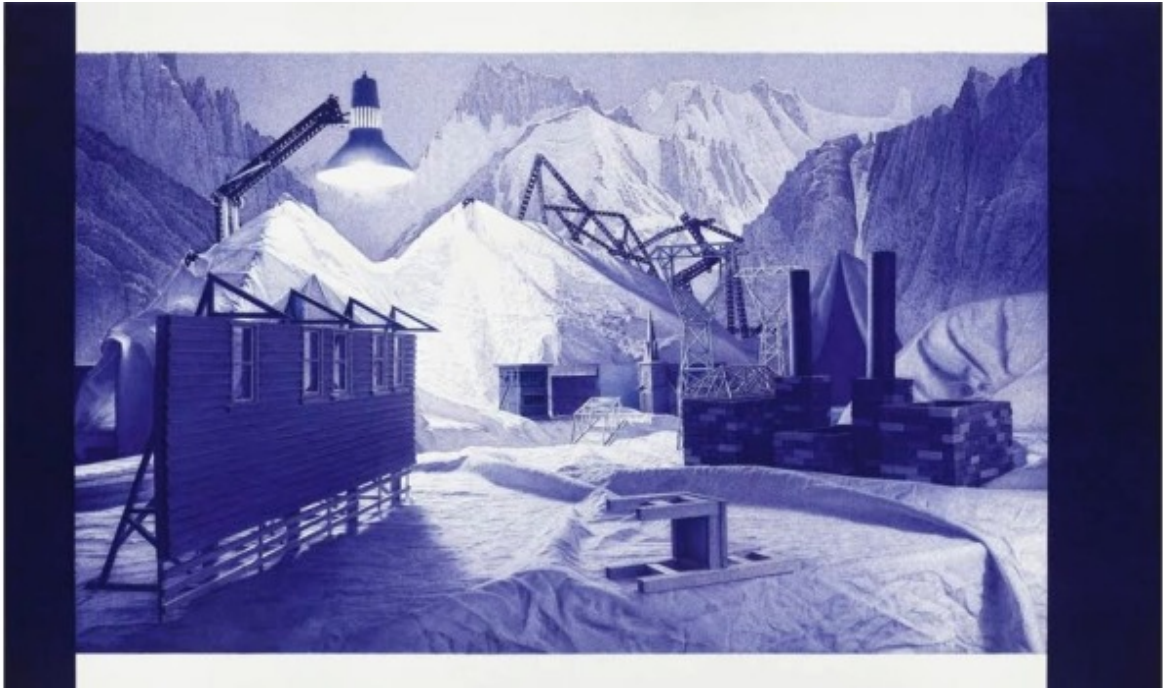


Selkie, by Jack Trolove.

JACK TROLOVE

Until the mid 19th century, artists were expected to produce paintings in which the surfaces were flat and paint was just used to make the image, not to be emphasised for its own sake. That all changed with Impressionism and subsequent modern movements. In Jack Trolove's portraiture, the subjects struggle to emerge from great slathers of oil paint. His works seem abstract at first glance, then not quite so, and then the face of a man or woman suddenly appears as if by magic.

This effect is partly the result of the large size of some of his canvases and the close-up take on the face. Once seen the face will never disappear, but the viewer may still marvel at the dynamic paint and unexpected colour conjunctions. In his most recent work Trolove has abandoned brushes and used only palette knives, so the mood of the final image is established by just a few smears of paint.



Empire, Palace, Throne, by Stephen Ellis.

STEPHEN ELLIS

The ballpoint pen is more often used to write shopping lists than to produce fine art. Stephen Ellis employs a particular brand that rolls out a luminous blue ink. The surreal drawings that result have sharpness of focus, strong, directional lighting and a compelling sense of depth. Ellis' impossible scenes are in fact exquisitely accurate, because they are based on models he makes of his subjects, lit like museum dioramas.

His 20 years in the film and TV industries stand him in good stead here. His theme is human impotence in the face of nature's elemental forces – timely, in a world affected by climate change. Against backgrounds of mighty mountains and surging seas we see the flimsy works of man: facades, piers, furniture, Meccano columns and pathetic attempts to simulate snowy peaks by draping sheets over scaffolding. As Ellis says: "The painstaking accumulation of large images out of tiny marks speaks to the heroic futility of attempting to repair a damaged planet."



Marakihau, by Ngatai Taepa.

NGATAI TAEPA

Given that many of the ideas of modern art were borrowed from tribal art, it is logical that young Maori artists should reshape the traditional forms of their culture to conform with "modern" ideas. What they are really doing is moving that culture along and refining it, just as their ancestors did.

As a third-generation member of this group, Ngatai Taepa has been able to look both forwards and backwards, studying traditional Maori art forms and the variations played upon them by artists such as Buck Nin, Robert Jahnke and Shane Cotton. Taepa uses these precedents with refreshing directness, seeking what he calls "achieving excellence through simplicity". His paintings have a satisfying overall integrity and contemporary feel, and his wooden constructions, made from various plywoods with precision routers and saws, magically blend old and new. At a time when art internationally seems to be wandering in a creative desert, artists such as Taepa show us that the past can revivify the present.

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