

A small, light-colored airplane is flying in a clear blue sky, pulling a long, thin banner. The banner is white with the word "SPECTACULAR." written in red, capital letters. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds, and the sun is visible in the upper right corner, creating a bright, hazy area. The airplane is positioned in the lower left quadrant of the frame, and the banner extends diagonally across the sky towards the upper right.

SPECTACULAR.

Profile of a Creative Professional.

Robbie Handcock

This year in May, two of New Zealand's main arts funding bodies released a report titled A Profile of Creative Professionals. Commissioned by Creative New Zealand and NZ On Air, the report was the first of its kind in the country to capture information regarding income, job satisfaction and the general wellbeing of our creative workforce. A key finding was the disparity in earnings between creative professionals and the general population. Median income for New Zealanders earning a wage or salary stands at \$51,800 compared to \$35,800 for creative professionals. However, only \$15,000 of that \$35,800 came from a creative income.¹ Working multiple jobs or sustaining an arts practice by holding work in an unrelated sector is the reality for many artists, particularly early on in our careers. To see that reality reflected in numbers is at once reassuring and frustrating—it validates our experiences as artists but lets us know just how bad the situation is for all of us. The harder it is to survive as an artist early on, the future health of our country's art industry becomes less certain. The New Zealand Government is taking note. Under Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's 2019 Wellbeing Budget, \$4 million over four years has been allocated to enable Creative New Zealand to improve working conditions of arts practitioners by providing fairer wages.² How this will be implemented and what this will look like in terms of our paycheques remains to be seen, but in the meantime most of us won't be quitting our day jobs any time soon.

For Elisabeth Pointon, much of her art practice has been informed by this very need to hold down supplementary jobs and by the specifics of these jobs as well. For the last four years, Pointon has been working for luxury car dealerships. Her practice often appropriates the visual language of big business, resulting in congratulatory banners, inflatable waving men, and aerial advertising. Self-identifying as a 'double-agent', referring to her work as artist as well as bookings coordinator, Elisabeth is interested in the potential to reshape corporate environments in a way that might facilitate rewarding and productive relationships with one another. The use of language and double-entendre here is integral to her project. Past artworks have included banners lifted from business emails reading "well done to all" or "good job", presenting them as congratulatory instead of the cold deliberateness they originated from. An advertorial blimp that hung in the window of the Dowse Art Museum read "It's a big one.", referring both to its own size and occupation of space as well as the significance of a brown queer female artist's first exhibition at a public institution at an early stage of her career. Pointon takes the empty affirmations of big business and imbues it with a genuine intent and a richness that comes from multiple readings.

This year's Hobiennale sees the third iteration of a project that came out of a conversation about art and money, resulting in play_station's first exhibition of 2019 titled WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT. Pointon and I, living together in an artist flat in Wellington, were talking about what we called our lotto works—projects we'd want to do if money were no object. Pointon's response was

to hire a plane, a reference to a work called Plane Text curated by Adam Shopkorn for the 2012 Art Basel Miami Beach. It featured works by fifteen artists billed as the most important artists working in text today. Twelve of them were male and fourteen were white. After a cursory Google search, Elisabeth found costs for such a flight wasn't as inhibitive as we first thought and on the 20th of January 2019 the Auckland aerial advertising company Airbubble flew a banner reading "SPECTACULAR." over One Tree Hill. While Shopkorn describes an interest in using "budget advertising for some of the most established and sought-after artists", the experience of an emerging artist pulling off the same stunt was a different story.

There's an obvious discrepancy in resources between an ARI-led project and the spectacle of large-scale art fairs. This first flight was entirely self-funded, largely from a fundraiser gig held at our flat featuring musician friends willing to play for free, and our willingness to compromise on the comfort of direct flights for a cheaper, and very uncomfortable, overnight bus from Wellington to Auckland. Additionally, there was generosity from the air company itself cutting us a deal for the flight. After discussions with Pointon about ideas behind the work, the importance of visibility and occupying public space as a minority artist, they shared their experience of being the black sheep of the airfield and identified with the intent. While other flight companies were offering flight training and war plane acrobatics, Airbubble were assisting with marriage proposals and smear campaigns. Without the luxury of big budget backing, these projects have relied on the assistance and generosity of friends and like-minded supporters. From her ongoing relationships with suppliers through to writers and everyone else along the way, Pointon's work brings together around her a diverse community to share in a united vision and goal. Ideas of inclusivity and representation inherent in the work is practised in the process of the production itself.

The second iteration of this project, titled WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT AGAIN., appropriately found its home at Auckland Art Fair in May of this year. Pointon showed with play_station at the fair alongside Auckland artist Deborah Rundle, both of whom took playful digs at the institution that is the art fair—Rundle featured two helium inflated sharks, a sly inference to characters in the dealer game, and Pointon organised a second plane-towed banner to hit Auckland's waterfront reading "BIG DEAL.". Like the first flyover, the second took support in the form of another fundraising gig as well as generosity from Auckland Art Fair organisers allowing us to occupy the venue's mezzanine space dedicated to non-commercial work. Again, Elisabeth's double entendre comes into play. It is a sarcastic response to New Zealand's largest commercial art event, flying a rather unpurchaseable work, while also acknowledging the significance of a young not-for-profit gallery showing an emerging artist at the same event. There's a skill here in balancing the tone of something that could easily be read as pointed. The critique is real, but there's a levity that allows you to laugh along. In Pointon's work, the audience is always in on the joke.

FOR THE LAST TIME WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT. signals the year-long project's finale in this format. Pointon and play_sta-

tion's participation in Hobiennale saw us receive financial support from external parties—Creative New Zealand and Hobiennale itself—for the first time. While alleviating the financial pressure associated with executing another emerging artist and gallery project, the collaborative work involved between artist and gallery remains significant. While funds only covered so much, it's the manpower contributed that has been essential in executing these works. The exhibition consists of an six-metre-long inflatable plane with the word "FANTASTIC." in vinyl on its side, video works of previous flights, and a plane banner reading "OUTSTANDING." which was originally intended to take flight over the opening weekend of Hobiennale. After Pointon's original pilot for the planned Hobart flyover fell through, a series of conversations with other flight companies from across Australia have come back with restrictions on costs, flightpaths, or Civil Aviation Safety Authority approval. While 'outstanding' was initially intended to play on its double meaning of both 'exceptionally good' and, in the business sense, 'not yet paid', it could now stand to reflect the project's lack of a neat resolution.

After two successful flyovers in New Zealand, it almost makes sense to me that the first international attempt for this aspect of the project would face such hurdles. It reflects the precarious positioning young artists and galleries often find themselves in. This year has seen Pointon and play_station having to manage our day jobs alongside our artistic commitments, all the while looking for enough time and money to execute increasingly ambitious projects. While much of the departure points for Pointon projects come from the corporate world, it also speaks to the labour and work that artists do. By reconsidering how we might engage with our workplaces and relationships in it, Pointon also asks us to consider the cost of being a creative professional today.

1 http://www.creativenz.govt.nz/assets/paperclip/publication_documents/documents/715/original/20052019_a_profile_of_creative_professionals_report_final.pdf?1558318144

2 <http://www.thebigidea.nz/stories/what-we-got-in-the-wellbeing-budget>

3 Warren, Tamara. "Plane Text". <http://lifeandtimes.com/plane-text>

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