

Bells and whistles

Bena Jackson, Robyn Walton, Nicholas Shackleton,
Ngārongo Phillips

curated by Moya Lawson
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The artists in *Bells and whistles* consider the potential of objects, as found or overlooked entities. In particular, they investigate the implications of mass-production's mechanical hands, and the needs that it satisfies. They share an interest in reinvention, using modest methods of craft to reframe the contexts which they draw from. Moving beyond simple appropriation, they mirror, echo or completely transform their subjects. By doing so they characterise, with unabashed imagination, the fleeting 'thingness' of the material world that we inhabit. Coined by Dada, glitized by Pop and curdled by a Koons-esque capitalism, what relevance do these inanimate beings have in the present day? At a time when we are equally drowning in physical waste as we are in virtual realities, such work briefly intercepts our distractions with a curious, quiet power.

Robyn Walton *Fluffer* 2017

Robyn Walton *Body of work* 2019

Bena Jackson *Spring Hat Window with Woolly Lambs* 2019

Ngārongo Phillips *Time, of Death* 2019

Nicholas Shackleton *Gamer* 2018

Robyn Walton

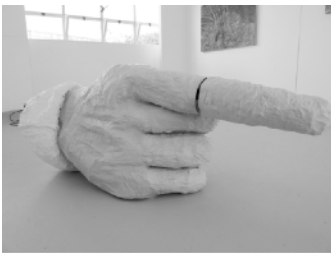


Eraser head 2019

Our understanding of use and labour becomes fraught once an object is made desirable. This underlines Robyn's experimentation with found objects, which are often domestic tools, the most purposeful. Through minor and formalistic distortion, she emphasises our relationship to 'function' by rendering it obsolete. She is always thinking about this in relation to the art gallery, a space where the object is made both debilitated and invaluable, presenting parallels to the realm of marketed wants.

Fluffer (2017) is an old-school egg beater fixed with shuttlecocks. Recalling a lost era of elbow-grease, it has been made illogical, useless and airborne. *Body of work* (2019) is a series of plaster casts of utensil drawers set on trays with wheels. Their clean, softly curved minimalism—perhaps a result of their organisational purpose—serves an aloof art sense. The wheel, the so-called harbinger of civilisation, has been fixed with no necessity intended.

Robyn Walton holds an MFA from Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland. Recent exhibitions include *I Lean You My Support* RM Gallery 2019; *Combine the Package You Can Use and Read it in More Versions*, Laurel Project Space 2019; *Mix Tape*, George Fraser Gallery 2018; *Net Work: this is not a group show*, West Space Melbourne 2017.



from *Garage Band 2018*

Bena Jackson

Bena's practice traces the incidents and eccentricities that speckle our everyday, dwelling on these as her subject matter. She uses handmade, ad-hoc methods to counteract the mass-produced norm. In recent years she has explored New Zealand's department stores, particularly those of the mid-century blossoming of commercial enterprise. She scours their records for the shop-window mascots who witness our shopping experiences. They are anomalies of craft and creativity amid the bigger, more dazzling picture.

Spring Hat Window with Woolly Lambs (2019) takes from a photograph (see printout) featuring two mannequin lambs in a window display of the former James Smith Department Store, which operated off Cuba Street between 1906 and 1993. She's created a doppelgänger, liberating it from the awkward menagerie of hats, shoes and fake plants, isolating its quirky insignificance.

Bena Jackson holds a BFA (Hons) from Massey University Wellington. Recent exhibitions include *Storm water solutions* with Teresa Collins, Toi Poneke 2019; and *The Shining*, Brooklyn Scout Hall 2018. An upcoming project is a work for Circuit's Masons Screen in 2020 with Max Fleury.



Ngārongo Phillips

Ko Wai Poroporo Aki Āki 2018

Twisted balloons have strange, blurry associations: school fairs, buskers, creepy clowns. They bring a corny delight, and are a universal emblem of where the fun is happening. Ngā's interests lie in our understandings of Māori art and the power structures it serves. Her purpose is to reclaim it—from the plasticising, generalising grip of the tourism industry—and make it her own with ironic, iconic flare.

Taking on the role of contemporary 'weaver', she laboriously weaves balloons into giant shapes. *Time, of Death* (2019) is a hovering celestial bed, flaring out like a burst cocoon. It's monumental and beautiful, but due to the medium will obviously deflate slowly and surely over the course of the exhibition. As a synthetic, ephemeral being, it comically plays on deeper themes of life, demise and the man-made failures that threaten them.

Ngārongo Phillips (Ngāti Mutunga) holds a BFA (Hons) from Whitireia Polytechnic and Massey University. Recent exhibitions include *Double Bond*, Embassy of Hungary 2018; *Ko Wai Poroporo Aki Āki*, Wellington QT Museum Hotel 2018.



Nicholas Shackleton

Stereo 2018

Gamer (2018) is the ultimate gamer station, built by Nick for his own obsession. It's fitted with a PlayStation 2, 3 and 4, and a Nintendo Switch. All his games are in alphabetical order. It is well stocked with Dorito's, three kinds of energy drink, and a cheeky vape, guaranteeing zero interruptions. According to Nick, this is exactly how his 10 year old self would make it, 'a charmingly over-engineered solution to a non-existent problem'.

Nick builds clean and compact but extravagantly imaginative installations. They are scrupulous blueprints of his own memories through surpassed technologies. As childhood companions, these consoles, tablets and Tamagotchi's will be tinged with nostalgia more and more in the age of the smartphone race. Here the experience of playing Grand Theft Auto in the gallery is kind of like a 'readymade' in itself—a bit absurd.

Nicholas Shackleton holds a BSc from the University of Sydney. Recents exhibitions include *Ubiquity*, Sunday Night Club 2018. Upcoming projects include a work for the 2020 Performance Arcade, as well as for Cubadupa.