

**ONE DAY SCULPTURE**

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A NEW ZEALAND-WIDE SERIES OF TEMPORARY PUBLIC ARTWORKS

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**NICK AUSTIN &  
KATE NEWBY  
HOLD STILL  
A CRITICAL RESPONSE  
BY LOUISE MENZIES**

## **Nick Austin & Kate Newby**

### ***Hold Still***

**Saturday 30 August 2008, 9am to 9pm**

**Western Park, Ponsonby, Auckland**

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*Nick Austin and Kate Newby's work Hold Still took place in Auckland's Western Park/Rimutahi. The artists inserted into this colonial design for peaceful recreational strolling, a number of sculptural and participatory features that subtly transformed the environment. In the middle of the park atop a raised platform, Austin and Newby placed a telescope similar to those employed by amateur ornithologists. The telescope pointed towards a distant table and chairs but not to any obvious landmark of significance. The slight strangeness of the telescope's placement and the absence of an obvious owner activated a compelling curiosity to step up and look through the lens. What confronted the participant was an uncanny tableaux consisting of a fake seagull standing on a newspaper. On scanning the horizon with the naked eye from the same platform, another tableaux involving fake seagulls was revealed across a valley. Together these locations functioned to engage the audience's imagination drawing them to venture down the winding paths in search of a close-up experience. While incongruous, the seagulls were no more foreign or artificial than the park itself, encouraging a critical reflection on the colonization of nature and the nature of colonization.*

*Commissioned by Cuckoo*

*Project Curator: Jon Bywater*

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### **Louise Menzies**

On any day in Western Park you will see people walking their dogs. Situated at the fringe of the Auckland central business district, this open area is one of the few places where dogs are permitted to roam off the leash. Walkers follow the paths which snake down and across the depressed shape of the gully that dominates the geography of the park, curving off to the edges lower down where the plane flattens to accommodate a sports field, tennis courts and children's play area.

Originally known as Te Rimu Tahī (the one Rimu tree), which refers to the ridge line now delineated by Ponsonby Road, Western Park was vested in 1875 with the intention of showcasing specimen trees from all over the world; as a place for spectating Nature — a tree museum, if you like.

Placed throughout the park are information panels and

plaques, detailing local histories and botanical data. Wooden benches and tables dot the slopes. An unusual feature is an antiquated exercise circuit, connected to the longest track that loops around the boundary of the park. Made of a series of discrete structures of metal or wood, it provides facilities for chin-ups and sit-ups, together with signs offering instruction on stretching. *Hold Still* absorbed and lightly twisted these details, specifying a view, and making clear an activity of looking in a place already about contemplation.

Nick Austin and Kate Newby's casually placed birds, newspaper and rocks referenced the sorts of things we expect to find in parks. Arranged in relation to the sightlines of a telescope, these elements accumulated to create a diagram across space, drawing a line down, and across the area of the park. Positioned at standing height, atop a tripod on a pre-existing paved circular platform that

led off from the main path, the telescope was easily visible, standing out to those looking for the artwork, as well as park users perhaps unaware that an art experience was on offer. Drawing on the natural sense of outlook this site already suggested, the device created an air of expectancy. Often surrounded by a small crowd of people, the scene signaled activity and attention. Appearing, perhaps to the uninitiated, like a group of nature enthusiasts, or an amateur science club.

Viewing was only possible one at a time, giving rise to a sense of anticipation amongst those waiting their turn. Stepping up to the telescope, the view framed within the lens affected something like a visual jolt. A ready-made seagull decoy (made from polystyrene and chicken feathers) — placed on top of a park bench, and perched on the day's paper — drew a sense of surprise that was reinforced by the actual shift in state brought about by the physicality of looking through the scope. The natural distance of the park compressed to form a close-up of the arrangement and allowed for the construction of a view to also become the object of study. A telescope is, of course, often used after dark, and for viewing across the far greater distances of outer space. Peering into the eyepiece, across a park in the light of day, the magnified scene on the other side moved between the comical and something magical, providing an illusion similar to that of a stereoscopic postcard, or View-Master toys.

As the initial revelation of the work softened, a painterly quality emerged. The construction of the bird, sitting on the daily paper reconfigured as still life — became a jocular study of what might be seen, or imagined, in the urban outdoors. This sense of composition extended to the rocks, oddly stacked beneath the table, and two other fake gulls placed on a different bench to the right of the central viewing platform. These gulls faced in the same direction as the telescope, offering, it seemed, direct recognition of the audience gathered together on the paved stage, who, watching others watching the bird-on-newspaper construction below, introduced an additional level of reflexivity already at play on the very nature of viewing.

This continued to unfold through the possibility to observe the birds unassisted by technology. At close range, the mock gulls were even more absurd, their off-yellow-coloured plastic beaks and feet combined with the dyed grey and blue feathers to further enhance their presence as a prop. In this way, a calculated exaggeration within the operation of the work became clear, bringing to mind the

tricks of stage make-up, and cartoons. This controlled use of oddness heightened an awareness of the general conditions of the park, transforming the familiar with a pleasant and unexpected kick.

One further peripheral component to *Hold Still* made this broader intention clear. Available at the park on the day were copies of a loose page publication made by the artists. Comprising an A4 colour-copied sheet, and stuck to one half of a brown manila folder, this 'handout' occupied an ambiguous zone between an oversized flyer and an artist's page-work for a magazine. Collating a selection of images and publication titles, it provided a series of open references to take away.

The authors listed included Robert Walser, Frank O'Hara, Michel de Certeau, Kenneth Gangemi and Hans-Peter Feldmann, all of who describe, in one way or another, routines of observation. *Hold Still* could well represent a similar sentiment. Previously Austin has expressed an interest in "how the how can become the what".<sup>1</sup> In other words, how an action might form a statement — or, in the case of *Hold Still* — how walking in a park may reveal the kinds of aesthetic experience art can help us to see. In a statement for *The New American Poetry*, Frank O'Hara notes that:

"It may be that poetry makes life's nebulous events tangible to me and restores their detail; or conversely, that poetry brings forth the intangible quality of incidents which are all too concrete and circumstantial. Or each on specific occasions, or both all the same time".<sup>2</sup>

Austin and Newby's work revealed, through an economical arrangement, the potential poetry of the everyday, while relieving us of the cliché through their light and perfect joke.

To conclude with Robert Walser:

"Mysterious and secretly there prowl at the walkers heels all kinds of beautiful subtle walker's thoughts, such as make him stand in his ardent and regardless tracks and listen, so that he will again and again be confused and startled by curious impressions and bewitchings of spirit power, and he has the feeling that he must sink all of a sudden into the earth, or that before his dazzled, bewildered thinker's and poets eyes an abyss has opened. His head wants to falloff, and his otherwise so lively arms and legs are benumbed. Countryside and people, sounds and colours, faces and farms, clouds and

sunlight swirl all around him like diagrams... convulsed, he laboriously tries to retain his normal state of mind; he succeeds, and he walks on, full of confidence.”<sup>3</sup>

1. Taylor, Dane, 'Nick Austin', *Celebretard*, No.1, 2007. p. 16

2. Allen, Donald (Ed.), *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, California: University of California Press, 1971. p. 500.

3. Walser, Robert, *The Walk*, London: Serpent's Tail, 1992. p. 87.

## Nick Austin

Austin graduated with a Master of Fine Arts from Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland in 2004. He has since exhibited in numerous spaces around New Zealand and Australia and was the recipient of a Creative New Zealand New Work Grant in 2007. Recent exhibitions include *Echoes, Echoes, Echoes*, Gambia Castle, 2008; *On Appetitb*, Artspace, 2007; *Strands, Clumps*, The Physics Room, 2007; *Poor Memory*, Gambia Castle, Auckland, 2007; and *In A Room*, Starkwhite, Auckland, 2006.

## Kate Newby

Kate Newby has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions in New Zealand and abroad, most recently completing the Masters Programme at Elam School of Fine Arts in 2007, with the project *My Poetry*. Recent exhibitions include: *A Windy Fire*, at Te Tuhi, Auckland; *On the Benefits of Building* at Gambia Castle, Auckland and *Moment Making*, a group exhibition curated by Laura Preston at Artspace, Auckland. In 2006 Newby exhibited in *Silver Clouds*, a project curated by Cuckoo in Melbourne, Australia, and in 2004 she participated in *Remember New Zealand* at 26th Sao Paulo Biennale, Brazil and facilitated a series of site-specific urban projects, *Very Interesting, Very International*, in public sites in Europe and the USA. Newby actively publishes and contributes to artist's books.

## Louise Menzies

Louise Menzies is an artist and writer living in Auckland. Her practice ranges between sculpture, photography, performance and writing, with recent projects including 'Talking while Swimming' (Te Tuhi; Gambia Castle, 2008), 'Shelter or Marquee' (Enjoy, 2007) and the ongoing series 'Sparkling Duets' (Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2006; The Physics Room, 2007). Menzies has written for various publications and artist catalogues, such as Telecom Prospect 2007 and Natural Selection, and is currently a contributing writer to Frieze.com.

## Recommended Reading

Feldmann, Hans-Peter, *The Little Seagull Book*, Köln: König, 2004

Gangemi, Kenneth, *Oit*, New York: M. Boyars: Scribner, 1984

Newby, Kate, *My Poetry, For Example* (Artist Book), 2007

O'Hara, Frank, *Meditations in an Emergency*, New York: Grove Press, 1967

Taylor, Dane, 'Nick Austin', *Celebretard*, No. 1, 2007

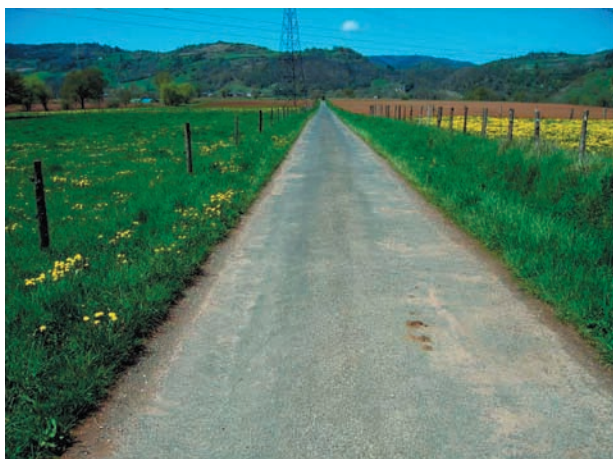
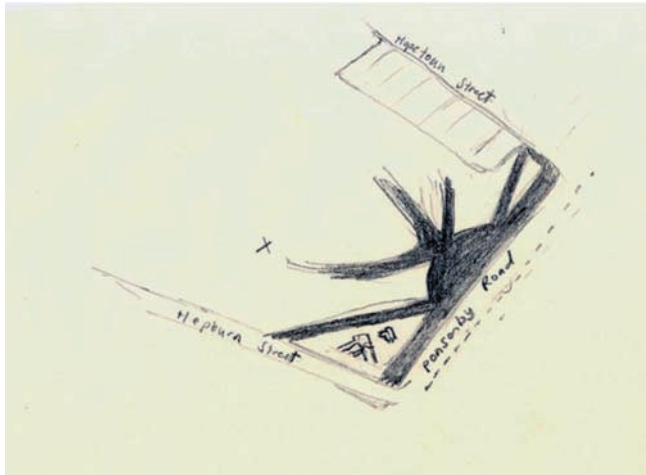
Walser, Robert, *Selected Stories*, New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982

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# Hold Still

## Nick Austin & Kate Newby

Te Rimu Tahī / Western Park, Auckland  
Saturday 30 August 2008 9am - 9pm  
One Day Sculpture



The Walk, Robert Walser  
Meditations in an Emergency, Frank O'Hara  
The Practice of Everyday Life, Michael de Certeau  
Olt, Kenneth Gangemi  
The Little Seagull Book, Hans-Peter Feldmann