BETWEEN MEMORY AND TRACE
Extra special mention does need to go to Luke for producing a remarkable new work for the exhibition. This work was an important piece for Te Tuhi because of its significance to a hotly debated incident in South Auckland. During his well-attended artist’s talk Luke profoundly articulated the nuances of the work as both a preserved item of overlooked urban history and as an action that has made very real physical changes to the neighbourhood of Manurewa. Since Te Tuhi is a merging point for many communities from all over Auckland, the conflicting opinions on this tragic incident were often debated and discussed in front of Luke’s work. I would like to thank Shannon Te Ao for his essay and for bringing this project to the attention of Bruce around two years ago which resulted in laying down the core concepts for the exhibition. Shannon together with Hopkinson Mossman gallery and the technical assistance of Te Tuhi’s Guy Nicoll should also be thanked for their guidance and assistance to Luke in realising this work. Following Te Tuhi’s commissioning of this piece it was then exhibited as part of the 5th Auckland Triennial, curated by Hou Hanru and opened in May 2013. Its inclusion in the Triennial soon after the showing at Te Tuhi is a testament to the potency and importance of the work – I am immensely pleased that Te Tuhi could assist in making it a reality.

My sincere thanks to Auckland Council and the Contemporary Art Foundation for their continuing support of Te Tuhi to provide innovative exhibitions. Te Tuhi strives to contribute a programme that melds internationally significant works alongside the local to help position Auckland’s place in the global artistic community.

Finally a sincere thank you to our small but highly dedicated and fearless team here at Te Tuhi, with whom I have the pleasure of working.
Introduction

Bruce E. Phillips

In his poem ‘In Memoriam A. R.’ Jorge Luis Borges writes, ‘man’s memory shapes its own Eden within.’ In this passage Borges suggests that memory functions selectively by editing the past within the mind. Herein lies a great contradiction of memory: that to remember, something must be edited out and forgotten. When this process of selective remembrance is expanded from an individual to the collective, the ramifications are escalated to the erasure of people and the history of their existence.

Between memory and trace grouped together three projects that examine this contradictory process of public memorialisation. The three projects were unified by conceptual practices that employ strategies of intervention and exchange to elicit varying aspects of erasure or precariousness in relation to the memorial. By doing so, the artists resist the political rhetoric and nation-building narratives commonly evident in forms of civic remembrance.

Working with the ephemeral trace of a person’s life was for Ruth Ewan an opportunity to pay tribute to a politically silenced figure. Ewan memorialises the notable singer, actor, athlete and activist Paul Robeson (1898–1976) in two works. Robeson became a target of the U.S. government during the McCarthy era ‘witch hunts’, in an operation that attempted to silence his political and cultural prominence. In the work Them that plants them is soon forgotten, Ewan reflected upon this attempted erasure by growing over 200 ‘Paul Robeson’ heirloom tomato plants in the Te Tuhi courtyard. As the plants matured, gallery visitors were able to enact a form of commemoration by eating the tomatoes. Within the gallery, Ewan also installed The New Idealism: an grid of empty record sleeves carrying the indentation of Robeson’s recordings. This fragile material memory stood as a potent reminder of the attempted deletion of Robeson’s music from cultural history and raises questions as to the political role of artists within society.

Responding to the site of Shalom Park in Cork, Ireland, Maddie Leach’s work Evening Echo questions permanence in relation to collective remembrance. Shalom Park was opened in 1989 and its name marks a connection to Cork’s dwindling Jewish community who have lived in the surrounding area since the 19th Century. The park’s opening ceremony included the illumination of a gas lamp—a gesture acknowledging the gifting of the land by the Cork Gas Company. After falling into disrepair for some years, the park was again ‘upgraded’ in 2003 and included a new suite of six electrically powered lamps. In 2011, Leach installed three additional matching lamps, completing a sequence of nine to correlate with the number of candles on the Hanukkah candelabrum. Linking a conceptual framework to Jewish tradition and a contract partnership with Cork City Council, Leach’s work proposes that for the next 50 years the ninth lamp be lit for only 30 minutes once a year, at sunset, on the last night of Hanukkah. Framed by a quiet, cyclical call to permanence, the public observance of this fleeting annual occasion remains uncertain. The work’s continued relevance is partially contingent on future communities in Cork to remember and enact remembrance. Evening Echo featured in Between memory and trace through documentation, artefacts and a live video event at dawn on 16 December, 2012 that gave viewers in Auckland the opportunity to witness the second occurrence of lighting the ninth lamp in Cork.

In a new work commissioned by Te Tuhi, Luke Willis Thompson attained and erased a site of trauma in Manurewa, Auckland. In the early hours of 26 January 2008, teenager Pihema Cameron was tragically stabbed to death by homeowner Bruce Emery. The incident occurred after Emery caught Cameron and his cousin tagging his three prominent street-facing garage doors. After confronting the pair, Emery gave chase with a knife and stabbed Cameron in a nearby cul-de-sac. While the garage doors were not the site of the killing, they became closely associated with the act of the ‘tagging’ in news reports. Locally the doors and the trace left by the tagging became a tangible marker of the death from which to retell and remember the story. For Thompson’s contribution to Between memory and trace, these same doors were removed, replaced and installed at Te Tuhi. Through this act of exchange, Thompson negotiated with the homeowner to fast-track building renovations so his garage will no longer look the same from the street and thereby erase all visual association to the incident.

All three projects explore the potential of the ephemeral and everyday as profound but overlooked vestiges of life. While the works ultimately memorialise their subject, they also simultaneously resist the convenient simplicity of conventional civic remembrance. Through this resistance, the artists critically question collective memory and the trace that is consciously created in its wake.
Street level mediation: a response to the work of Luke Willis Thompson

Shannon Te Ao

The installation is simple. Consisting of only three found garage doors. Without apparent fuss, each door is hung separately on a wall of its own, occupying three out of the four relatively small gallery walls. The presentation is matter of fact, focused on the clear and uncluttered display of the objects at hand. Essentially, it is the relationship between the object and the hand that lies at the crux of this new work by Auckland-based artist Luke Willis Thompson. Included as part of the exhibition Between memory and trace held at Te Tuhi in Auckland, the garage doors, which comprise the focus of the installation, do very little to explain their origin or the reasoning behind their being here. They tell us very little of their history and nothing of the way in which their objecthood has coincided with the deeply tragic and deeply personal.

Within the gallery space the garage doors relate to the body more or less as they would if they remained in situ. Although, within this context they resemble something in between industrially inspired minimalist sculpture and hard-edged, abstract painting. The viewer faces them front-on as one would a conventional painting and, like many paintings, closer inspection of the surface eventually reveals more for the eager or persistent. The surfaces of the doors begin to hint at their age. Their colour faded and suggestive of an eighties or nineties build, certainly nothing recent. Other blemishes – the kind that you would expect to find on a garage door like small dings, scuffs and scratches – would seem to support this. These doors are weathered in a way that cannot be simulated, only gained through sustained exposure to the elements.

Under the gallery lighting what appear to be large single letters painted on each of the doors are visible. The letters have been ‘painted’ out or over at some stage although, because of either the mismatching of the touch-up paint or the inherent differences of the particular paint used underneath, each trace remains visible. The letters begin to expose themselves – a B and an E? – the third might be a D or P? Simple enough in style, at this scale, the underlying letters describe broad, sweeping mark-making. They embody a ‘fluid’ style recognisable as that used in tagging and graffiti. An intuitive, performative script and, as the culture that lies behind the tradition would prescribe, one that is informed by repetition and often adrenaline, carried out under tenuous terms.

On 26 January 2008, Pihema Cameron was killed during a confrontation, which occurred when he and his cousin were found tagging the garage doors of the property of South Auckland resident Bruce Emery. Emery was later convicted of manslaughter over the death of the teenager. Throughout the media coverage of the case, trial and eventual sentencing of Emery, much of the public dialogue around the event focused on the aggressive nature of Emery’s (re)action upon confronting Cameron and his cousin. It was reported that after Emery initially apprehended the pair, he chased them approximately 300 metres down the road armed with knife.2 More anger surfaced in response to the apparent disproportionate sentencing of Emery after his conviction. Emery was sentenced to four years and three months imprisonment for manslaughter. The starting point for sentencing of a homicide with a knife is usually five and a half to six years but Justice Hugh Williams was quoted as taking into consideration factors such as Emery’s ‘family standing’ – and by inference, intentionally or otherwise, Cameron’s lack of.3 This fuelled claims of institutional racism from Cameron’s family and other media commentators.4 After sentencing, Cameron’s mother was quoted as saying that ‘justice had not been served’ adding that Emery would most likely be out in two years.5 Evidently, Emery was released after serving 11 months of his sentence.
The fact is that, as indirect bystanders, complete and reliable understanding of the event is impossible for those who do not share responsibility for the outcome between both parties, in a sense Cameron's personal struggle is over, as he is no longer a child. 

Therefore, most will be left with uncertainty toward Bruce Emery for his actions. Another might be to hearing of such an event might be to simply project anger toward Bruce Emery for his actions. Another might be to empathise. We can appreciate the immediate tragedy that is uncertain for most – where they simultaneously qualify as 'Cousin' would be more accurate but genealogical precision here as useful intergenerational markers for our respective age where they need not worry about the excess baggage of the three or so days of travel and ceremony were spent 

and work hard to demonstrate their own physicality while promote a full range of reaction. From them and this scale of ceremony requires a collective effort. The form of consumption of suburban everyday life. Their history, however, is a human being. '11 Thompson lays out a description to that of Pihema Cameron. 

The Watts riots were sparked by an event of – essentially – police brutality, where local youths reacted against what they saw as the unfair treatment they received by the police and this appeared unexpected to Cameron's death but also of the fact as useful interpretative instruments for our imaginations of the role that a 'simple' object may play in the articulation of our personal story. This is the dialectic model that Thompson proposes. Simultaneously undermining any sense of agency of the object valuing the personal significance of the object only. The rhetoric and the real. The form of consumption of suburban everyday life. Their history, however, is a human being. '11 Thompson lays out a description to that of Pihema Cameron. 

Additionally, One blog posted links to a Bebo page which was known by the masses but yet the action was respected and the level of reprimand he ultimately paid. This was potentially also a moment that if repeated would also seem that the opinions held are as diverse as possible. He goes on: 'The first time comes these young men cry freely. The age where one would have mourned before but as many of the boys here are the age where they still lingers for some. Most, however, wear the weight of their emotional expression to that of Pihema Cameron. 

Here Newton suggests that we all learn the social standard that will stay with them if they are not vigilant about these. The Watts riot and the Watts protest movement saw on the streets of Watts in August 1965, Black Panthers Speak' . Da Capo Press, 2002.  New York. p41. 

Thompson does ask a question of the viewer but within an indirect relationship to the object. Humans do not act on instinct as lower animals do. Those things that we do is the result of having been taught and that is our actions dictated by our choices that can determine the effects that Thompson proposes. Simultaneously undermining any sense of agency of the object valuing the personal significance of the object only. The rhetoric and the real. The form of consumption of suburban everyday life. Their history, however, is a human being. '11 Thompson lays out a description to that of Pihema Cameron. 

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Memorialisation has unavoidably become a civic political act. By this I am not only referring to the ubiquitous inert obelisk, statue or bronze plaque. The act of memorialisation and its political motivation are also evident in more intangible forms including the public speech, parade, or the televised news report. Even though many such motivations might be unavoidably subconscious, fuelled by assumptions deeply engrainged in the collective social psyche, it remains that public remembrance is an exercise in political influence. An influence that has the power to shape the formative tenets of identity, history and a sense of place.

Art often has a central role in memorialisation. For acting under the commission of the state an artist may be responsible for creating the image, monument, song or story. Art in this guise, more often than not, subsumes a redundancy of agency and critical integrity in favour of the politic at play. The obvious reaction against such compromise, usually involves forms of revolutionary iconoclasm or ideological activism. However, according to theorist Jacques Rancière, the problem of art being subsumed by politics is not simply solved by an act of oppositional subversion but rather maintaining an unresolved position in between. Rancière explains:

Art has lived for two centuries from the very tension by which it is at once itself and beyond itself, and by which it promises a future destined to remain unaccomplished. The problem is therefore not to set each back in its own place, but to maintain the very tension by which a politics of art and a poetics of politics tend towards each other, but cannot meet up without suppressing themselves ... To prevent the resistance of art from fading into its contrary, it must be upheld as the unresolved tension between two resistances.1

The exhibition Between memory and trace brings together three artist projects that, I believe, attempt to maintain such an unresolved tension in relation to the memorial. Jointly, the three artists strategically form various positions under the umbrella of conceptual practice by employing various means of intervention, exchange and the readymade. Through these approaches, the artists explore aspects of erasure or precariousness in relation to overlooked or forgotten social histories. In fact, it is not only an unresolved tension between just two resistances but numerous pairs of resistances that play a pivotal role under the rubric of memorialisation. I have identified three pairs of such unresolved tension apparent throughout all three projects. These include the tension between memory and erasure, engagement and estrangement, and the banal and profound. Due to the limitations of this essay, I explore each pair in relation to a single project rather than all three. Despite this, I aim to investigate these resistances as a sequence of interconnected in between that might aid in discerning levels of contextual depth within the artworks and to ascertain what the artists might be contributing to current practice.

Between memory and erasure

Memory is a selective phenomena that occurs both consciously and unconsciously in our daily lives. Our brains are an incredible processor of information but they are also evolutionarily programmed as bias editors. This bias editing engages in a process where some information is prioritised and saved while other information is deleted and forgotten. The end product of this process is memory. When this editing process is amplified from the individual to the collective, it is people and communities that are erased or forgotten.

However, with memorialisation, there is more at play than just selective memory. Memorialisation also often involves the claiming of space through the founding of a site. In discussing the topic of foundation sites, art historian W. T. J. Mitchell states that:

Historical events must, as we say, ‘take place’ somewhere and these places are almost immediately sacralised or monumentalised as foundation sites. The ‘taking place’, as native Americans sometimes say, requires a totemic keeping place to preserve memory and continuity ...2

Such foundational sites or totemic keeping places have also been described as time markers, designated areas in physical space that are preserved to create a perceived pause in the motion and flow of time.3 Subjective engagement with these time markers is important in
enabling individuals and communities to maintain a sense of place, one that informs the basis of identity and the understanding of being in the face of mortality. Therefore, it is within this pursuit of stasis amongst the complexity of life that the politics of space and time is fought.

The added complication here is that in the process of creating markers in time and space we also have to delete something. As Mitchell explains, the process of establishing foundation sites erases the actual ‘memory of the road to foundation’. To unpack the psychology at play within this inherent contradiction, he uses the example of the Gestalt diagram ‘one vase, two faces’ to point out the impossibility of focusing on both the figure and the ground simultaneously. Within this optical metaphor, it is the vase which stands as the time marker or memorial object in place of the face as the secondary negative space where the loss has occurred.

In this light, Luke Willis Thompson’s exchange with a property owner to obtain the garage doors used in his artwork simultaneously preserves and erases. His act of exchange oscillates between the figure and the ground as it does between the site and the saved trace. The action removes a local time marker of the tragedy and the history of the event as told through the news media. This act of erasure is also intended as an act of subversion on part of the artist to save, from inevitable destruction, the last remaining trace of a life. Conversely, due to the fact that after stabbing Pihema Cameron for tagging his garage doors, Bruce Emery proceeded to clean off the tag, and his marks are also evident on the garage doors through the abrasions left in the outline of the spray paint. Thus, Thompson’s act of collecting the doors preserves the trace of the victim but also the hand that killed. The mark of the killer is inextricably bound in the mark of the life lost; the time marker of the trauma is simultaneously erased and conserved as it is removed from the site, the complication between what is being saved and lost is bound in the impossibility of separating the figure and the ground.

This psychological conundrum is further added to by the repetitive use of particular language, have played their part in influencing public opinion or disseminating disinformation. As a form of public remembrance, these reports simplified remnants of information so that they might catch the eye of the reader, or more accurately, appeal to the latent bias of a certain demographic.

The graffiti-marked garage doors became the salient point for many news reports, through which Cameron was identified as the ‘tagger’ rather than the tragic victim of a violent act. As it turns out, the validity of the ‘tagging’ was later not deemed relevant to the judge in the sentencing of Emery. This revelation raises a number of pertinent questions: Why does a crucial point of interest to the media become irrelevant in a court of law? Whose interests are being served through the limited labelling of this individual? As a form of memorial, what effect does this type of reporting have on public remembrance?

In critiquing the lack of critical investigative journalism and fear-driven media rhetoric following 9/11, theorist Judith Butler explains that such examples of limited identity profiling in reporting hinders empathy and mourning:

Those who remain faceless or whose faces are presented to us as so many symbols of evil, authorize us to become senseless before those lives we have eradicated and whose grievability is indefinitely postponed.

She continues to explain that this facelessness also acts to limit critical discourse:

The foreclosure of critique empties the public domain of debate and democratic contestation, itself, so that debate becomes the exchange of views among the like minded, and criticism, which ought to be central to any democracy, becomes a furtive and suspect activity.

While the media may limit critical discourse in the public domain there are still other public platforms, such as public art galleries, that encourage independent perspectives to be voiced rather than cloistering discussion. By attaining the doors for the gallery context, Thompson shifts the remembrance from the street and eye of the media to the context of the art gallery, where slow thinking and contemplation are prioritised over attention-grabbing headlines.
Between engagement and estrangement

Butler’s position that empathy is contingent upon the understanding of life’s fragility is also of importance in the mode of strategic social engagement evident in Maddie Leach’s work *Evening Echo*. The question of empathy for Leach may operate within the notion that life is a slow and quiet passing and that this is heightened for those whose cultural perspective is in a direct mismatch with the fundamental tenets of the majority.

Leach’s intervention essentially attempts to reactivate a memorial mostly forgotten. In doing so, she calls on the problematic question of empathetic remembrance for a dwindling community whose memory is fading amongst the city’s current inhabitants. However, to mistake this motivation as an attempt at creating lasting social change would be a grave misreading.

As a type of social engagement, Leach sets up the possibility for participation but does not assume or presuppose that the offer is taken up. She made no Twitter announcements, no Facebook sharing of the annual event, rather, the occasion was made known to the public through a series of advertisements in Cork’s free newspaper the *Evening Echo*. Here, the artist made no attempt to fabricate a positive public situation in the beguiling neoliberal spirit of social inclusion.10 Alternatively, Leach establishes a conceptual framework that prioritises the possibility for physically present participation in such a way that allows for the artist’s own proposition to be ignored or discarded by the community. This approach allows social engagement to take place with various levels of criticality.

To understand this strategy further, it is important to consider how it combines forms of communicative and symbolic acts. Influenced by theorist Jürgen Habermas, communicative action is a type of social action geared to communication and understanding between individuals.11 Leach enacts a form of communication that partakes in the shared understanding of a specific location and community. She does this by adding to the existing six lamps together with the constituent ephemera (advertisement, poster, promissory agreement and publication). These communicative contributions allow the potential for a set of relations to be established through a participant’s own free will to engage. The example here is pivotal because it reduces the possibility for the artist to act as a manipulative agent in presupposing from an assumptive position what is or isn’t in the community’s best interests. It further posits a dramaturgical situation where time, place and the community set the context for meaningful engagement.

*Evening Echo* also functions strongly as a symbolic act. In the symbolic, there is no actual social exchange enacted only meaning attributed to the artwork beyond what its objective existence suggests at face value.12 This is particularly evident when considering the contingent material exhibited at Te Tuhi that has enabled their projects to maintain a resistance in this discourse is founded (individual/collective, author/spectator, active/passive, real life/art) but not with the goal of collapsing them. In doing so, they hold the artistic and social critiques in tension... for both art and the social are not to be reconciled, but sustained in continual tension.14

Between memory and erasure, and between engagement and estrangement. Throughout, I have emphasised the strategic conceptualism employed by Thompson and Leach that has enabled their projects to maintain a resistance in between these polarities. In considering Ruth Ewan’s work, fleeting illumination coupled with the sun setting in Cork as it rose in Auckland, these relationships subtly built upon the nuances of time and light as a fitting reflection on the passing of a generation. A myriad of other associations and attributed meanings could be further applied by taking into account the reproduction of the original ceremonial photograph, documentation of the first lamp lighting and a copy of the *Evening Echo* newspaper featuring the advertisement.

Here, strategic forms of communicative action and lingering forms of symbolic significance balance contemplation with participation and spectatorship. In doing so, there is a conscious decision to resist the presupposed emancipation of the viewer though social engagement – a proposition that risks not connecting with anyone but at the same time has the potential for deeply profound connections to be formed. This resistance, between engagement and estrangement, stands at odds to forms of participatory art that critic Claire Bishop argues are rather than ‘being oppositional to spectacle (and neoliberal capitalist agendas that champion the spectacle, have) now entirely merged with it’.13 Echoing Rancière, she continues to emphasise that...
The problem is that the civil calendar used by most of the world has abandoned any correlation between the moon cycles and the month, arbitrarily setting the length of months to 28, 30 or 31 days. The Jewish calendar, however, coordinates three astronomical phenomena: the rotation of the Earth about its axis (a day); the revolution of the moon about the Earth (a month); and the revolution of the Earth about the sun (a year). Also, a Jewish ‘day’ is of no fixed length, and there is no clock in the Jewish scheme.

Therefore, the last night of Hanukkah is observed at nightfall on 1 Tevet or sometimes 2 Tevet.
I will now investigate the third and final unresolved tension: between the banal and the profound.

In the Te Tuhi courtyard, a grove of over 200 heirloom Paul Robeson tomato plants grow in black pots. The grove’s presence invites joy in some, curiosity in others and overall a common acceptance by most gallery visitors and locals who frequent Te Tuhi. However, lingering behind the easy approval of these tomato plants is a troubled history. For the act of naming has politicised these tomatoes and so they carry the story of a man, the situation he found himself in and the cause he fought for.

No one knows who named this Siberian tomato variety after Robeson, only that the seeds were first exported internationally from Moscow in the early 1990s. Although, given Robeson’s fame and relationship with the Soviet Union during the 1940s, the connection is not wholly surprising. Neither is the fact that the Paul Robeson fruit is a ‘black beefsteak’ tomato – no doubt a deliberate racial insinuation of the African male body. Far from glorifying the memory of Robeson, these connotations further obfuscate his life and the significance of the plant in a confusing mix of Cold War politics and racial profiling.

Ewan entitled the installation, Them that plants them is soon forgotten, after the lyric from Robeson’s most famous song Of Man River from the Broadway production and film Showboat. Her use of the Paul Robeson plant does not function to reconcile the problematic associations embedded in the tomato’s naming. Rather, as the artwork title suggests, her use of the tomato plant is to further emphasise the complications within an existing form of memorialisation, to invite a reinvestigation of Robeson’s legacy and thereby a reflexive consideration of who and what is remembered or forgotten.

The allowance for participation in the work adds further layers of complexity. As the fruit ripened, gallery visitors were welcome to pick and eat the tomatoes. Given the associations to Robeson’s body through naming and the consumption of the tomato flesh, there is a similarity to the Catholic tradition of communion as a form of remembrance – an association that creates a tension between the joy of eating freshly picked heritage tomatoes and the elegiac remembrance of an artist who became a politically harassed figure. This almost Buddhist reflection on the unkind nature of life is emphasised to me by witnessing the behaviour of avian visitors to the tomato grove. Blackbirds made a habit of dropping in to feed off ripe fruit that had not yet been picked. The birds fluttered and fought over the remaining fruit only to wastefully peck out red patches on mostly green fruit. Yet, due to their beauty and behaviour, the birds invite other life such as insects, both beneficial and harmful, to establish the beginnings of an ecosystem.

In this work, Ewan creates a bittersweet commemoration that sends conflicting messages on the memory and fragility of life. At first consideration, however, many people would have simply recognised the work as only a grove of tomato plants. Between this initial objective recognition versus the social significance, which unfolds more slowly, is a powerful tension that shifts our understanding from the casually ordinary to the deeply insightful and back again. The resistance between the objective and subjective creates a lag that somehow invites the discovery of greater symbolic meaning to be experienced as if an epiphany.

Chicago-based artist Theaster Gates has been exploring this betwixt mode of objective and subjective comprehension in various projects that range from social events to urban regeneration. Of particular relevance to my enquiry here are his series of works titled in the event of race riot (2011), which consist of coiled fire hoses of the same vintage as those used against the protesting Black youths of Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. Critic Matthew Jesse Jackson quotes Gates and shares the meaning–making significance of this work:

Fire hoses are something you don’t really think about until they are necessary … but they’re filled with real potency: the potential of this tremendous amount of water and water pressure. And they summon the Ghost of Bull Connor onto an upper-middle-class stage, so it’s a psychological twofer: potency and pain in one package. Or, to paraphrase James Baldwin, white liberals tend to get an erotic charge from their fantasies of black rage. That is, it gives them a little shiver.

This white liberal emotional ‘shiver’ shares some similarity with the impact and reception of Ewan’s work. What this example also illustrates is the potential of inanimate material in conjunction with remembrance to awaken a response to past pain.

For DOCUMENTA (13), curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev conceived the notion of the ‘traumatised object/artwork’, one that gives some further understanding of materiality and pain. In her research, Christov-Bakargiev explored the history of post-traumatic stress disorder beginning with Sigmund Freud’s early studies of relived trauma in soldiers who had returned from World War I. Freud developed the theory that we have a psychological impulse to remove emotional tension or pain from our memory but that in some cases of severe trauma the psyche allows pain to remain unresolved and therefore relived after the fact. Christov-Bakargiev proposes that bodies of culture, like bodies of people, also suffer from a type of post-traumatic stress disorder. Trauma causes inanimate objects to undergo and relive transitions of symbolic and objective meaning – transitions that if recognised can help us react to a sense of the precariousness of life.
Throughout dOCUMENTA (13), there were many examples of artworks and historical artefacts that illustrated Christov-Bakargiev’s proposition. Sharing similarity to Ewan’s work was the planting and display of Korbinian Aigner’s apple varieties. Known as the Apfelpfarrer (apple priest), Aigner was a Catholic priest whose anti-Nazi stance during the 1930s resulted in his imprisonment and ultimate deportation from Germany.20 His most enduring form of resistance was the cultivation of four new strains of apple, which he named after concentration camps during his four years spent in Dachau.21 As with the Paul Robeson tomato, Aigner’s act of naming irrevocably associates a humble apple with both the horror of the Holocaust and the memory of resistance.

Context is integral for the transition of the traumatised object’s symbolic meaning to shift from the banal to the profound in such artworks. The road to uncovering this context has its rewards for those willing to sit with the object and to scratch the surface of its reason for existence. In the search for further meaning anticipation builds and the experience of discovery or impact of understanding are made all the more compelling. Carefully chosen words from the artist, curator or institution are required in this process for both allowing the objective and the subjective contexts to be considered with subtlety and time.

All the projects included in Between memory and trace rely, to some degree, on this lag between experiencing the objective existence of a work and the availability of explanatory reading material. Some might argue that supplementary material makes such artwork dependent on an institutional voice to elucidate secret meanings only known to the few. The great assumption within this logic is that art should be a cohesive visual language that is easily known to the few. The great assumption within this logic is that art should be a cohesive visual language that is easily understood, and this assumption shows an apparent lack of awareness that all art is culturally relative and therefore reliant on an existing context in which deeper meaning can be found.

Ewan, Leach and Thompson are artists who take considerable time to research the specific nuances of the material and contexts in which they are working. They are also artists who are greatly aware of the implications of information and display, and, because of this, steer away from the didactic methods of museumology. For museum practice seeks a reductive taxonomy and simplicity of information. Whereas, these artists are aware of the stinging implications that such methods can have on the histories of people and the meanings of objects. Their alternative approach, therefore, is to explore the potential of the ephemeral and everyday to be considered as symbolically profound, but ambiguous and open-ended, remnants of human life.

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Context is integral for the transition of the traumatised object’s symbolic meaning to shift from the banal to the profound in such artworks. The road to uncovering this context has its rewards for those willing to sit with the object and to scratch the surface of its reason for existence. In the search for further meaning anticipation builds and the experience of discovery or impact of understanding are made all the more compelling. Carefully chosen words from the artist, curator or institution are required in this process for both allowing the objective and the subjective contexts to be considered with subtlety and time.

All the projects included in Between memory and trace rely, to some degree, on this lag between experiencing the objective existence of a work and the availability of explanatory reading material. Some might argue that supplementary material makes such artwork dependent on an institutional voice to elucidate secret meanings only known to the few. The great assumption within this logic is that art should be a cohesive visual language that is easily understood, and this assumption shows an apparent lack of awareness that all art is culturally relative and therefore reliant on an existing context in which deeper meaning can be found.

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List of works

Ruth Ewan

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Them that plants them is soon forgotten, 2010–12
Crop of 200 Paul Robeson heritage tomato plants
Photos by Sam Hartnett courtesy of Te Tuhi

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The New Idealism, 2010
Collection of inner record sleeves
Courtesy of the artist and Rob Tufnell Gallery, London
Photo by Sam Hartnett courtesy of Te Tuhi

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Paul Robeson archive
Paul Robeson, Greatest Hits, insert from album,
EMI Records, 1977
Paul Robeson, Knowledge Card, Pomegranate
Publications, California
Plays and Players, May 1959, featuring Paul Robeson
as Othello
Advertisement for Robeson’s posthumously released
greatest hits album
The Persecution of Paul Robeson, Headlines, August 1976,
10 pages from the declassified secret intelligence files held
on Robeson from CIA and MI5
Photograph of Robeson and Nikita Khushchev
Here I Stand, Paul Robeson, Beacon Press, Boston, 1958
Paul Robeson Black Heritage US postage stamp, 2004
HMV advert in Paul Robeson UK Tour Programme, 1929–30
Negro Spiritual, by Antonio Salemme, article on the
censorship of the original statue of Robeson, Time,
December 1930
Photos by Sam Hartnett courtesy of Te Tuhi
Maddie Leach

Evening Echo, Tuesday 27 December, 2011
Active at sunset on the last night of Hanukkah
Shalom Park
Gas Works Road & Albert Road
Cork, Ireland
Nine electric lamps (1 x 4.6m; 8 x 3.6m) with ‘Chatsworth’ columns, ‘Kensington’ lanterns and metal halide bulbs; SELC candeloln street light control system.

p.21
‘Promissory Agreement’ document between Maddie Leach and Cork City Council
Installation view. Photo by Sam Hartnett courtesy of Te Tuhi

VHS footage of the opening ceremony of Shalom Park, 28 April 1989. 59 min
(Reproduced courtesy of Fred Rosehill)

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Documentation of the first instance of Evening Echo, Tuesday 27 December 2011. Photo by Clare Keogh

p.22
Announcement in the Evening Echo newspaper, designed by Warren Olds

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(video still of Fred Rosehill, 16 December 2012)

p.24–25
Live video feed to witness the second instance of Evening Echo, on Sunday, 16 December, 5–6 a.m., Auckland New Zealand
Courtesy of the National Sculpture factory, Cork and Te Tuhi

p.26
Reproduction of Shalom Park ceremonial photograph, 1989

Luke Willis Thompson

Untitled, 2012
Three garage doors relating to the death of Pihema Cameron, 26 January 2008
Courtesy of the artist and Hopkinson Mossman, Auckland
Commissioned by Te Tuhi

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Installation view. Photos by Sam Hartnett courtesy of Te Tuhi

p.18
Documentation of the garage doors in Manurewa, photograph by Caroline Boreham

p.18
Technical drawings courtesy of the home owner and the artist
Ewan's work encourages collaboration and participation – in the past she has worked with historians, traditional craftsmen, musicians and school children. One of her best-known works A Jukebox of People Trying to Change the World is known works. A Jukebox of People Trying to Change the World

In 2011, Ewan had her first major UK solo exhibition Brink & Heckle at DCA, Dundee, and was a contributor to the Folkstone Triennial. Ewan exhibited in Altermodern: Tate Triennial (2009) and was one of fifty international artists selected for the Younger than Jesus exhibition at the New Museum, New York (2009).

Maddie Leach

Maddie Leach's practice is project based, conceptually driven and frequently involves research into the specifics of the site in which she is working. With her interest in the development of new thinking in relation to social, place-based and process-driven art, Leach’s early work held a central position in New Zealand’s relational aesthetics practice. While no longer overtly participatory, her work continues to explore ideas of spectatorship, expectation and strategies of cooperation in the production of artworks. Leach’s recent projects often operate beyond the walls of the gallery and focus on constructing complex arrangements between space, time, place and audience.


James McCarthy

James McCarthy has been the executive director at Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts since 2009. Previously he worked as the school manger for the Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland. As a sound artist, he has exhibited and performed extensively both nationally and internationally.

Bruce E. Phillips

Bruce E. Phillips has been the curator at Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts since 2011. Throughout his practice, Phillips has explored how a critical awareness of performativity and contextualisation can influence the function of art institutions for the benefit of artists. In 2008 he curated Close Encounters, together with Chuck Thurow, an evolving curatorial project at the Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago. Phillips has also curated over 30 exhibitions featuring artists such as Tania Bruguera, Maddie Leach, Derrick Cherrie, Eugene Hansen, Tahi Moore, Aru Pennanen, William Pope L., Santiago Sierra and Angela Tiatia.

Shannon Te Ao

Shannon Te Ao is a Wellington-based artist, curator and writer currently lecturing at Massey University’s Whitireia School of Art. His work as an artist has focused on producing collaborative, performance and video works. Recent exhibitions include Follow the Party of the Whole, Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin 2013, Moving on Asia, City Gallery Wellington, 2013, The New Artists Show, Artspace, Auckland, 2012; he was also selected as the 2012 Rita Angus Artist in Residence, Wellington. As a writer he has contributed to the exhibition catalogues Tanya Ruka ‘Pukuhu’ and ‘To Tāte Kāinga published by Papakura Art Gallery. In his previous role as Te Tuhi’s Exhibitions Manager & Curatorial Assistant, he curated projects including the artists Fiona Jack, Bepen Bhana and Yona Lee.

Luke Willis Thompson

Luke Willis Thompson’s art deals with sites and objects that embody a sense of historical, political or social trauma. In recent work the artist has used readymade objects – such as a local funeral home’s art collection and a house in the Auckland suburb of Epsom – to trace the faultlines of race and class in his chosen context. Thompson sets up estranging encounters where the viewer is confronted with an object both ontologically and in the space of narrative and mythology.

Selected exhibitions include: 5th Auckland Triennial: Auckland Art Gallery, 2013; inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam published by Papakura Art Gallery, Auckland, 2011; In Spite of Ourselves: Approaching Documentary, St Paul St Gallery, Auckland, and The Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt, 2012; Make/SHIFT: Tautahi’s Third Tertiary Show, St Paul St Gallery, Auckland
Acknowledgements

Maddie Leach:
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Luke Willis Thompson:
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Te Tuhi:
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