

# RALPH HOTERE

[1931-2013 Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Aupōuri, Te Rarawa]

## February, May and the Birds of Ice. The Moon

### Drowns in its Voices of Water 1970

Pigment dyes on alkyd resin on canvas

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased 1974 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society

---

*February, May and the Birds of Ice. The Moon Drowns in its Voices of Water* was commissioned for the exhibition *Ten Big Paintings* held at Auckland Art Gallery in 1971. After touring to Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin, the painting was acquired by Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

*Ten Big Paintings* offered a group of ten invited artists the freedom to work at an unprecedented scale, providing them with stretched canvases of a fixed size to be configured into a work based on the scale of a 3x6m commercial billboard. *February, May and the Birds of Ice. The Moon Drowns in its Voices of Water* was Ralph Hotere's contribution. His artist statement in the accompanying exhibition catalogue was characteristic – an empty orange circle.

Hotere's painting takes a complete 2-line poem by Bill Manhire as its title. At the time Manhire had yet to publish the poem, which was subsequently released in the 1971 issue of *Review*, the University of Otago Students' Association literary magazine. It is likely that the text came to Hotere via 'various bundles of poems and poetry off-cuts' that Manhire regularly shared with his friend in the later years of the 1960s. *February, May and the Birds of Ice. The Moon Drowns in its Voices of Water* appeared within a number of Hotere's works, and the flow of words and images between himself and Manhire were a rich vein of his creative practice. Although this has often been described as a collaboration, it might better be thought of as reciprocal exchange between friends. As Manhire later said: 'I don't think Ralph works as a collaborator...he brings things to life in the gaps and spaces and accidents that other people – and circumstance – make available.'

# FIONA CONNOR

[b.1981 Aotearoa New Zealand]

## **Community Notice Board (Full O' Life) 2016**

Custom corkboard, silkscreen and UV prints on aluminium, pins, tape, staples  
Collection of Jan Warburton

## **Community Notice Board (Frogtown) 2015**

Timber, metal, fittings, painting, UV prints on aluminium  
Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Given 2022 by the artist and Coastal Signs.

## **Community Notice Board (Fernwood Market) 2022**

Custom corkboard, silkscreen and UV print on aluminum, pins, tape, staples  
Courtesy the artist and Coastal Signs, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

---

Fiona Connor's *Community Notice Boards* have been described as 'micro-histories' – works that shift a dynamic set of social interactions into a fixed archival space of art making and collecting. Each notice board is a careful recreation, replicating every element from push pins to cellotape, flyers for lost dogs, and rooms for rent. In this respect, each notice board catalogues the social nuances of its particular place and time and records Connor's own encounters with these sites as she goes about her day-to-day life in L.A. She describes the form as being 'hyper-responsive to time, space, and ultimately the community they serve, a physical representation of a forum or a social space.'

Stepping back, or sideways perhaps, into the gallery context, Connor's notice boards offer up an art historical lineage. The panels of *Community Notice Board (Fernwood Market)* echo the form of the winged alter-pieces of the European Renaissance, forms that carry a direct community function and tradition within Christian worship. *Community Notice Board (Frogtown)* recreates a shrine-like bulletin board, built and tended to by private homeowners, that connects to traditions of care and service to community through art. In her careful attention to her subject as object, Connor also brokers a relationship to still life traditions, a genre concerned with the material of everyday life. Across all of these works, the accrual of text and images speak to the fundamental acts of mark-making and visual language – messages of the human wants, needs, gains, losses, and connections that have long traced culture and identity.

# JEFFREY HARRIS

[b.1949 Aotearoa, New Zealand]

## Winter Road 1985

Oil on canvas

Dunedin Public Art Gallery loan collection. Courtesy of the Seifert Family.

---

In 1982 Jeffrey Harris travelled to Europe and America, taking an opportunity to view first-hand some of the major developments that had been reshaping painting internationally over the preceding decades. The sheer size of many works left a strong impression and on returning home Harris began the project of up-scaling, creating substantially larger compositions that he made bigger again across multiple panels. *Winter Road* is a marker of this time – the point at which the moments, characters and images contained within Harris' earlier sequential compositions broke free into a much larger and looser format.

While overseas Harris had seen works from Francis Bacon's important series of triptychs, which left a strong impression. *Winter Road* picks up on Bacon's interest in the triptych as a disruptive format – one that could interrupt a linear narrative and reshape it into something more multi-directional. In Harris' painting, forms and figures are recognisable from earlier works, disparate fragments of time and place that offer no tidy conclusion. *Winter Road* is also peppered with red herrings, sending some searching for meaning in the title (after a poem by Alexander Pushkin), or in the series of dates inscribed on the reverse of each panel. Across these three panels, Harris uses time and experience as materials that can be disassembled and reconfigured into dissonant abstract forms.

# MADAME & THE BASTARD

## (JULIA MORISON & HEATHER STRAKA)

### **Madame descending the staircase** 1999

C-Type print mounted on board

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Given 2016 by the artists.

---

*Madame descending the staircase* offers a tantalisingly slippery narrative that unfolds across a series of carefully staged photographic vignettes. Borne out of a collaboration between artists Julia Morison and Heather Straka, the work operates in the realm of uncertainty – a stop-motion story that draws together scenarios from film and fiction, yet withholds any tidy conclusion.

Created at Olveston, an historic home in Ōtepoti Dunedin, *Madame descending the staircase* plays with the social coding of this house and the excessive *mise-en-scène* of the 19th century Spanish wall tapestry that provides a backdrop. Across the images, the characters themselves remain anonymous, the bulk of the action taking place off-stage. Through glimpses of activity, costume and props, a story can be pieced together – each viewer landing on their own unique conclusion. The collaborators lean-in to this ambiguous or fluid interpretation created by withholding a complete narrative. Discussing an accompanying series of short films that were created around the same time as *Madame descending the staircase*, Morison reflected on the way that viewers were almost compelled to apply a narrative to the fragmented images and scenarios proposed in these compositions. *Madame & the Bastard* delight in loosening their images and characters from the bounds of logic or reality. Instead, their collaboration offers a fluid set of elements that can be pieced together or teased apart in a myriad of ways.