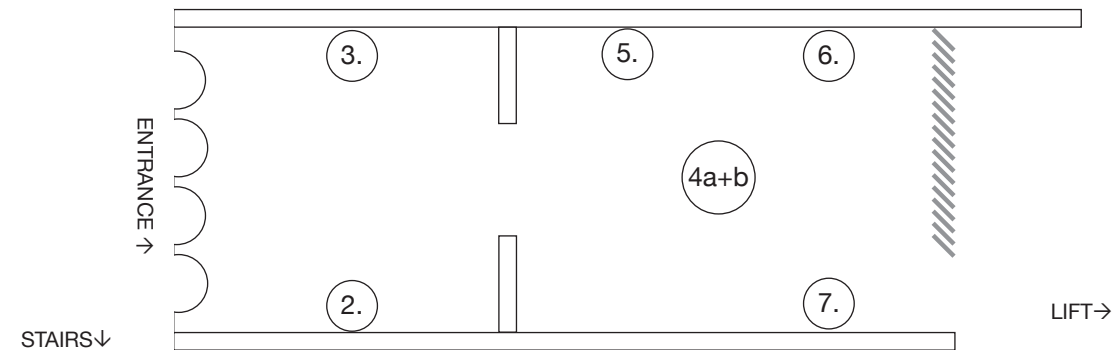


GUIDE TO THE WORKS IN **LOVELINESS EXTREME**

1. The series of architectural gestures which encompass the DPAG Collection works make up Charlotte Drayton's *Held Past Close*.



# Loveliness extreme

**1. CHARLOTTE DRAYTON**

[b.1989 New Zealand]

**Held Past Close** 2017

MDF cladding and arches, jointing compound, framing timber, custom skirting and architrave, 100mm slatted vertical blinds in 'cloud' with aluminium tracking, marble-effect linoleum (zest collection, black and white octagonal check)  
Courtesy of the artist.

**2. KIM PIETERS**

[b.1959 New Zealand]

**Abraham's journey - after Kierkegaard** 2012

Mixed media on board  
Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.  
Purchased 2012 with funds from the Dunedin City Council.

**3. PETER SIDDELL**

[1935-2011 New Zealand]

**A Place To Stand** 1978

Acrylic on hardboard  
Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.  
Purchased 1978 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society with the assistance of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council.

**4a. L. BUDD**

[b.1953 New Zealand]

**A Rose is a Rose is a Rose is a Rose...** 1996

Oil stick on postcards  
Jim Barr and Mary Barr loan collection, Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

**4b. UNKNOWN**

**William IV tilt top pedestal table** c.1835

Rosewood veneer on mahogany frame  
Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.  
Given 1966 by Mrs Nora Jessie Burns.

**5. ANDREW BARBER**

[b.1978 New Zealand]

**Study (butch) II** 2010

Oil on linen  
Jim Barr and Mary Barr loan collection,  
Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

**6. ANDREW BARBER**

[b.1978 New Zealand]

**Study (Hydrangeas)** 2011

Oil and gouache on linen  
Jim Barr and Mary Barr loan collection,  
Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

**7. MATTHEW SMITH**

[1879-1959 British]

**Mixed Roses in Two Jugs** 1929

Oil on canvas  
Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.  
Purchased 1947 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society through the National Art Collections Fund, London.

*Loveliness extreme* was curated by  
**Lucinda Bennett**, Dunedin Public Art Gallery  
2017 Creative New Zealand Curatorial Intern  
of Contemporary Art.

**creative***nz*  
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22 July – 23 October 2017

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# Loveliness extreme

Sentimentality is a word which not only describes feelings of tenderness, sadness or nostalgia but suggests an excess of these feelings – an overindulgence in their affect. Furthermore, these feelings tend to be unearned: Oscar Wilde phrased it best when he professed that ‘a sentimentalist is simply one who desires to have the luxury of an emotion without paying for it.’<sup>1</sup>

In her essay *In Defence of Saccharin(e)*, writer Leslie Jamison attends to the many critiques of sentimentality, carefully unpacking the ways in which it has been variously condemned and dismissed, posing the incisive question: ‘is the problem of sentimentality primarily ethical or aesthetic?’ She elaborates,

While its moral critics attack sentimentality because it accords undue agency to emotions – distracting us from conceptually rigorous or logistically tenable ethics – its aesthetic opponents attack sentimentality from another direction, claiming it does our emotions a disservice by flattening them into hyperbole or simplicity.<sup>2</sup>

Taking its cue from this positioning of sentimentality as a two-pronged problem, *Loveliness extreme* considers the processes and politics by which spaces, symbols and patterns are able to evoke sentimental feelings. The problem of aesthetic value is brought to the fore, visualised and tested through architectural forms in the works of Charlotte Drayton and Peter Siddell. These explorations are continued in the abstract marks and materiality of Kim Pieters’ sensuous painting, in Andrew Barber’s familiarly-patterned canvases, and finally through two vastly different treatments of the prosaic symbol of the rose in the works of L. Budd and Matthew Smith. Dealing in subtle gestures and clear clichés, this exhibition seeks to reveal sentimentality where it is hidden in plain sight, inviting us to question the power of these feelings and their potential to hold sway.

*Loveliness extreme* is formed around and within Auckland-based artist **Charlotte Drayton’s** large-scale architectural work *Held Past Close* (2017). In her practice, Drayton regularly employs architecture as allegory, drawing on over-used styles to gently probe the cultural circumstances they were borne from and question the value-laden reactions they may arouse.

For this exhibition, Drayton’s intervention works to domesticate the gallery, slowing the viewer

down and altering their affective experience of the space and the Dunedin Public Art Gallery collection works placed within it. With arched doorways and marble-textured flooring, *Held Past Close* references our self-conscious antipodean quotation of the historic architectural styles of Mediterranean countries – a quotation which seems to signify a collective aspiration for a more sophisticated lifestyle, but has instead resulted in a pervasive aesthetic of absolute ordinariness. Deliberately incited, the descriptors ‘ordinary’ and ‘normal’ become loaded, exposing middlebrow proclivities and the implicit hierarchies they are borne of. They hint at the relative luxury of having been raised to easily decipher these gestures as shorthand for a particular way of living. Through reproducing aspects of so-called ‘ordinary’ architectural styles, *Held Past Close* reveals the subtle ways in which our personal tastes and reactions are culturally produced, shaped by the ongoing centrality of euro-centric architectural tropes.

Such architecture also takes centre stage in **Peter Siddell’s** eerie *A Place to Stand* (1978). Ostensibly depicting somewhere on the edge of Auckland City, Siddell’s painting is a fiction, pieced together from fragments of the city’s architecture and isthmus landscape. Similarly to Drayton, Siddell has taken a selection from the world and edited it, manipulating his source material to elicit an emotional response from his audience. However, while *Held Past Close* divulges the ways in which nostalgia works to idealise and flatten history, *A Place to Stand* seems to lean into those functions. Indeed, the work acquired an unanticipated pathos in the decades following its production when the architectural demolition derby of the 1980s saw many of Auckland’s most cherished heritage buildings razed to make space for glass towers like those seen in this painting.<sup>3</sup>

Displayed within Drayton’s carefully configured spaces, Siddell’s painting acts both as a foil to her work and as evidence that nostalgia is a privilege. Scholar and artist Svetlana Boym defines nostalgia as ‘a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed... it is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy.’<sup>4</sup> This brings to mind an admired quote from Gertrude Stein: ‘there is no there there’. Penned in response to her discovery that the neighbourhood she had

grown up in had been torn down to make way for an industrial park, the line holds resonance in both Drayton and Siddell’s works: both are unreal places, ghosts gesturing towards a ‘there’ which never existed.<sup>5</sup> They are hollow signifiers waiting to be populated by meaning, whether through personal, cultural, political or affective readings.

The subtlety of Drayton’s work is in stark contrast to the apparent obviousness of roses, and yet both share the language of the banal. **L. Budd’s** *A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose* (1996) references a line from within Stein’s *Sacred Emily*, an abstract poem greatly influenced by Jamesian explorations of stream of consciousness. James’ theory suggests that as words and concepts are repeated, their relationships with other words and concepts may shift.<sup>6</sup> By employing Stein’s quote, L. Budd’s work illuminates one of the tactics by which a signifier (a rose, a pattern, an archway) may be instilled with meaning – or may collapse under the weight of excessive signification.

Through repetition, ‘a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose’ expresses the infinite forms of a rose, evoking all possible imagery and emotions associated with ‘a rose’ so the rose itself may take on greater significance for the reader or viewer. But which emotions are evoked by a rose? Why ‘a rose’ at all? The rose is certainly an inescapable image, used throughout history to symbolise romance and tenderness. It became cheesy a long time ago, used to decorate too many chocolate boxes, sold alongside teddy bears and cheap sparkling wine. In recent years, the rose has come back in fashion and can be found emblazoned on anything, from cellphone cases to skate shoes – Gucci even recently produced an entire collection starring the rose.<sup>7</sup> Explaining the title of his canonical text, *The Name of the Rose*, semiotician Umberto Eco has said his intention was to find a totally neutral title. He chose this ‘...because the rose is a symbolic figure so rich in meanings that by now it hardly has any meaning left.’<sup>8</sup> The inclusion of **Matthew Smith’s** still life *Mixed Roses in Two Jugs* (1929) – one of numerous rose paintings held within the Gallery collection – highlights the status of the rose as a generic symbol, seemingly imbued with meaning but ultimately immaterial.

The burden of symbolism is cast off in **Kim Pieters’** *Abraham’s Journey – after Kierkegaard* (2012). Through non-representational painting, Pieters’ work evades concrete connotation,

attending to our sensate bodies and the way we are moved when we stand before the work. Each mark made is a push, a tremble, a stab in the dark, their meanings subjective and ever-shimmering. Her use of demolition pieces of hardboard as painting surface speaks obliquely to the language of architecture, evoking a kind of material nostalgia through their position within the cycle of destruction and refurbishment. Making a more direct appeal to personal memories, **Andrew Barber’s** patterned canvases, *Study (Hydrangeas)* (2011) and *Study (butch) II* (2010), could be seen to recall any number of things: tartan picnic rugs; school pinafores; punk (or emo, or hipster) fashion trends; the grid. Or perhaps, as their titles suggest, they allude to the searing blue of hydrangea blooms and the agricultural connotations of Swannndri shirts. These paintings highlight the absolute subjectivity with which value is prescribed to aesthetic forms. As with Drayton’s installation, Barber’s paintings blend monumentality with the banal, referencing the privileged tropes of Modernism yet broadly accessible through their allusion to more common and utilitarian uses of their chequered pattern.<sup>9</sup>

Placed within Drayton’s space, we may be inclined to look differently at each of these works from the collection. We may question their tactics and motivations, but also our own reactions – where they come from, their flavour, whom they serve. Through exploring the symbolic flexibility of architecture, patterns and motifs, and through questioning the sentimental nature ascribed to their forms, we may become aware of sentimentality at play in the world – and we may be inspired to question it there, too.

## Lucinda Bennett

1. Oscar Wilde, *Selected Letters*, edited by Rupert Hart-Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) 501.

2. Leslie Jamison, “In Defence of Saccharin(e)” in *The Empathy Exams* (Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2014) 115-116.

3. Justin Paton, “Peter Siddell, A Place to Stand (1978)” in *Beloved: Works from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery* (NZ: Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 2009) 200.

4. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001) xiii.

5. Gertrude Stein, *Everybody’s Autobiography* (USA: Random House, 1937; 1971) 289.

6. The title of this exhibition is also taken from *Sacred Emily* (1913).

7. Alessandro Michele’s rococo-esque *Garden Collection* launched mid-2016, its offerings including a pair of sneakers and a denim jacket, both stitched with roses.

8. Umberto Eco, *Reflections on The Name of the Rose* (UK: Secker & Warburg Ltd., 1985) 3.

9. *Study (butch) II* is a scaled down version of an architectural-scale work, *Stiff blanket (butch)*, (2010).