SAY SO:
VOICES OF PROTEST
AND PAUSE

18 September – 10 October 2018
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2018 marks the 125th anniversary of women’s suffrage in New Zealand. One of the aims of the Suffrage 125 commemorations is to celebrate game-changing individuals of a range of ages and cultural and socio-economic backgrounds who do extraordinary things to create positive social change for women and New Zealand. Students from the 2018 ARTHIST 734 Art Writing and Curatorial Practice class have chosen the art works in this exhibition to focus attention on the issues around equality and voice which are occasioned by the suffrage commemoration.

In 1937, artist Hans Hofmann said Lee Krasner’s work was “so good, you would not know it was painted by a woman”. Feminist art historian Linda Nochlin died last year, never having heard a satisfactory answer to the question she posed in her famous 1971 essay “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” She herself could only conclude that greatness is a moving target designed to make women miss it:

“The fault, dear brothers, lies not in our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles or our empty internal spaces, but in our institutions and our education … everything that happens to us from the moment we enter this world of meaningful symbols, signs and signals.”

Twelve students from the postgraduate programme in the Art History Department at the University of Auckland have written the short catalogue entries about the art in this exhibition as part of the assessment for their course ARTHIST 734 Art Writing and Curatorial Practice. They are thanked for their efforts along with the artists who have agreed to have their works reproduced, and Annette Keogh from the University Library who has oversight for the University Art Collection.

Linda Tyler, Course Coordinator,
ARTHIST 734 Art Writing and Curatorial Practice.

EXHIBITION KAITIAKI

Robyn Kahukiwa
Mana Waihini Maori, 1993
Printmakers proof on rives paper
545 x 440mm
University of Auckland Art Collection
Although better-known today as a curator, in 2006 Michelle Menzies was a recent graduate of Elam School of Fine Arts, and the co-founder of Window Gallery, with a lens-based media practise.

Here, Menzies has created a lightbox to back light a moody photograph, depicting abandoned rooms in a house being removed to make way for gentrification. The triptych format gives this representation of domestic space an aura of reverence, emulating the altar of a church, which is emphasised by the back-lighting effect from the light boxes. This creates a nostalgic view of an old, now derelict, domestic space, evoking hardship and moments of joy. We are reminded that domestic space is occupied predominantly by women. It is a stage where women's voices can be heard. After all, how do you get heard in a society that has not given you a voice; that restricts your movements and limits your focus to the domestic sphere? The first step to gaining political power, for having a voice that is heard, and listened to, was to become a voter, and therefore someone who could influence the outcome of elections.

For many women, domestic spaces were often the only place they could get together for political discussion. In this image, there is a glimpse of the neighbouring property, and we are invited to cross the staid boundary of the proverbial picket fence. Change begins when you invite your neighbours around for afternoon tea, and some vigorous, informative, political discussion. And it’s hard not to wonder how some of those conversations would have gone. Was there debate? Dissent? Coercion? Manipulation?

When remembering the voices of the suffragists, I contemplate the places they had available for conversations, where they decided their course of action, and steeled themselves for the fight. Determination and a bloody-minded tenacity was seen as they went door to door for signatures in an era of limited transport and poor access, visiting women in their homes. The women of the Christian Temperance organisation that drove the Votes for Women petition developed a camaraderie that united them for the common good.

Women’s issues were not solved by gaining the vote in 1893. In the home depicted in this art work, discussion would have continued throughout the generations: the birth control pill, abortion rights, access to the Domestic Purposes Benefit, state homes for single mothers, dawn raids, the Springbok tour, homosexual law reform, matrimonial property law, pay equity.

While enjoying Menzies depiction of these worn empty spaces, it is easy to imagine standing within the space, hearing voices of dissent echoing back at us in the empty rooms. What would those voices be saying to us? I suspect they would be reverberating in the emptiness with the message that the work isn’t finished yet.
Michelle Menzies
(born 1985)
Lot 39-A 2006
Set of 3 Duratrans
on lightboxes
1025 x 810 x 10mm
1575 x 880 x 10mm
1025 x 810 x 10mm
When was the last time you were angry enough to rip out a newspaper article? Torn from the page and blown up to readable size by artist Simon Cuming, this article takes on a life of its own. The word “corrections” has been typed over in red, as has the top bullet point. With these modifications, Cuming calls attention to the otherwise-easily-overlooked fact: the art of Rose Nolan, a female Australian artist working with text, has been mistaken for a Billy Apple work. The word “mistaken” in this context is generous. Was there research done? Or was the artwork assumed to be by Apple, a well-known male artist, without a second thought?

Cuming’s work speaks to a history of gender-based assumptions, exposing the insincerity of some attempts at balance. In this news article, the error is acknowledged, but not redressed. Without voicing the problem through discussion, explanation, or even apology, the article merely treats the symptom and not the cause.

In 2018, the year of the 125th anniversary of women’s suffrage in New Zealand, professionally damaging discrimination is still occurring. While tangible gains were made through the winning of the vote for most New Zealand women in 1893, it did not fix years of power inequality. It was merely the first win in an exhausting, often violent struggle for equality. Cuming’s screenprint of a newspaper article is a reminder of the petition sheets glued together, the bullet-pointed correction as signatory.

Voice in the media is a vital part of opening the conversation, yet, as shown by this Weekend Herald article, unconscious bias exists, and what slips through the net of the fact-checkers speaks volumes. It is important to remember, in this context, that the bill passed in 1893 gave the vote only to white and Māori women, excluding Asian men and women residing in New Zealand. Despite what the headlines proclaim, it has not been 125 years for everyone.

Untitled was acquired from ARTSPACE’s series of 21 screen prints commissioned from, and printed at, Elam School of Fine Arts by Simon Cuming for their 21st anniversary, in 2008. Nine of artists represented are female. Though heartening, this almost-equal statistic is rare. Within the art world, bias manifests not just as incorrect attribution, but also in auction sales, solo exhibitions, and art history texts, each of which tend to favour white, male voices.

In highlighting these two brief sentences published in national media, Cuming reveals a deep-seated practice of dismissal, prejudice, and complacency toward female artists. Rose Nolan is given neither credit, nor exposure, nor respect. Apple’s name has been slapped below her work, while Simon Cuming, another male artist, appropriates the error and sells it. Cuming consciously highlights how male artists can benefit from a system which hinders women, even as he paradoxically profits from it in his own practice. Who reads the corrections anyway?
Simon Cuming
Untitled 2008
screenprint on paper:
660 x 508mm
Edition of 50

Corrections, clarifications

- A Weekend Herald picture caption described a work of art as being by Billy Apple. The artist was Rose Nolan.
- Clarification: Changes to degree courses offered at Unitec include the withdrawal of master of architecture (by projection) to restructure of architecture (previous...
This painting brings together many elements to create a striking, disjointed vision. By creating a two-dimensional image and digitally printing it onto a shaped polyester base with a fibreglass shell, Sarah Munro created a three-dimensional sculpture that grabs the attention of any who see it. Munro has a Doctorate in Fine Art in 2005 within the University of Auckland’s Elam School of Fine Arts. In 2006 Munro was the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship Fellow at the University of Otago. From there, her multi-media has been included in both public and private collections. Socket was finished in 2003, before this, and yet even then her mastery that she holds is clear, boldly put into eyes that seem to glow and yet hide.

Using her half-brother as her subject, Munro exercises her labour-intensive process and creates an abstract moment where there are no ears and very little hair, defining features masked. The androgynous face only adds to this moment of softness. The detachment of the eye and the concave of the creation pushes straight out into the viewers space, pushing the frontier of a traditional portrait. Socket really pushes the boundaries of Munro’s work, as she works within the relationship of painting, technology, and representation. With the soft background muting and yet amplifying the image, the super imposition of the paint on top of the image invites a deep, thoughtful gaze.

Added to the University of Auckland’s Art Collection in 2003, Socket is a wonderful, honest addition to the collection, with an emotional response being evoked in anyone who views it. The way that it does push into the space, forces you to see it, and as you move around it is almost like the eyes are following you. This in itself is masterful. With the large two metre wide and two and half metre high image, the severance of the eye seems to push out even further than the rest. This portion of the eye, painted onto a smaller piece of polyester foam gives the work an even greater physical presence. The massive size of this project pulls in a level of aerodynamic polish, that is amplified by the abstract vision that Munro gives us with the divorced eye.

Created with the intention of celebrating diversity within art but also society, Socket speaks of the emerging culture of commemorating women and the continuous movement of the suffragette that has moved into the modern world through action and conversation. In this honouring of the 125th anniversary of New Zealand’s suffragette movement, Munro’s work embodies the ongoing debate around the struggle of diversity within art, and as we move forward in the discussion, Socket is an example of art moving with us. The modern take on a traditional portrait leads into the future of women rights and inclusion for not just women, and men, but also the LGBTQ+ community, which has only been enabled because of the battle women began to fight 125 years ago.
Sarah Munro  
(born 1970)  
Socket 2007  
Oil paint digitally printed onto shaped polyester foam with a fibreglass shell.  
2500mm high x 2000mm wide x 250mm deep.
Among Fiona Pardington’s compelling still-life photographs of museum taonga, her huia are some of the most poignant. This Ngāi Tahu artist’s mastery of drama and the moment gives her pictures the power to evoke strong emotion, and the apparent simplicity of this image does not silence the many echoes that sound in its dark void.

For Māori, huia feathers symbolise mana. Previously, high-ranking rangatira wore the white-tipped tail feathers in their hair or hung dried huia skins from their ears. Because of this association with the head, both birds and feathers of huia were highly tapu. Until the upheavals caused by colonisation, the hunting of huia was subject to strict restrictions.

The darkness of this photograph tells a story of death, and of extinction that is death absolute. Victorian demand for rare specimens like the two birds in the image fuelled a panic to obtain huia before the demise of the species. This in turn seriously impacted the last surviving huia populations. Take a good look at these dead huia, the living are no longer with us. In this photograph we hear the voice of the artist calling for humans to take responsibility for our effect on the natural world: to remember the once-living treasures that are already lost to us and to guard our other native birds against a similar fate.

But the photograph also honours the life of the two birds. From out of the shadows shine the orange wattles and golden beaks of the huia, tilted upwards as if in song. Huia were the first birds to sing in the early dawn, just as New Zealand was the first country to accord women a political voice. Male and female huia had different cries, and took turns calling before first light, responding to one another in the darkness. Huia remind us that gender is about equilibrium.

By leaving out the iconic white-tipped quills of the huia tail, we appreciate the varying shades of black in the body feathers. Their blue and green iridescence reveals Pardington’s ability to rekindle life from out of the darkness of oblivion. The placement of the birds lets us contemplate the shape of the space between the pair. In accordance with Polynesian thought, such space is not empty but filled by a relationship imbued with aroha and reciprocity. Huia birds were monogamous, mating for life. The short, strong beak of the male and the fine, curved bill of the female gave each pair a different role in their cooperative foraging. The male bird chiselled holes in rotting wood, his beak splitting the bark apart to expose insects, and the female reached into the holes to grab fat huhu grubs hiding in the deeper recesses. The artist shows the balance of this relationship by placing the birds in symmetrical positions within the frame.

The two beaks of the huia almost touch, recalling the spark of life between the outstretched fingers of Adam and God in Michelangelo’s Creation of Adam. Fittingly the female takes the place of God, her life-giving powers a reaffirmation of feminine power, though both genders stand level with one another.
Fiona Pardingtonn
(born 1961)
*Inseparable Huia 2016*
Pigment inks on
Hahnemühle photo
texture rag paper
1100 x 1500 mm
Jennifer French’s art is as much about the formal elements as it “is a personal testament, a set of subjective mysteries.” Each element has its own language that needs to be extracted. This dreamy image sits halfway between documentation of an artefact and a moment of a life.

Taken by Jennifer French while she was a student at Elam, it depicts a range of brightly coloured ceramic domestic ware that are not quite at home, nor in a museum. French has seen a vision of domestic bliss and transported it to the photographic studio to be formalised against a stark white background. The table is set ready for tea, with an indulgent pile of persimmon fruit at the peak of their ripeness; a vase with leaves as graphic as the brush marks on the pottery tempt the photographer’s eye with an array of subtle densities.

The key element of the photograph are the persimmons. The glossy orange skin of the persimmon echoes the bright and energetic hand-painted patterns on the pottery which were painted by designer Clarice Cliff in the Art Deco period. The patterns on the ceramics have meaning too - French has selected these ceramics because of the underlying biography of the artist Clarice Cliff, who worked in England at A.J. Wilkinson, where she pushed against the normal expectations that a woman should be content with any job. Cliff worked her way through the factory, learning the many arts of ceramic production, shifting from department to department. After twelve years working in the factory, Cliff was finally recognised as having unique talent, and given her own studio where she developed a body of brightly coloured wares under the range name ‘Bizarre’.

French presents these objects framed in the neutral white cube, removed from their domestic, environment and elevated to Art status. Perhaps a statement about the fact that women’s art from this, and many other periods, is often relegated to the domestic rather than the gallery environment. However, Cliff’s ceramics are now recognised as pieces of art themselves and are displayed for their artistic qualities rather than their functional value.

French sets up a lesson in this photograph: Like the persimmons on the plate which need to ripen before they can be eaten; it took time for Clarice Cliff to be recognised as an artist. French reminds the viewer that it has been a hard road for women artists to establish themselves in a mostly male art history. French shows us that even in subtle ways, we have a choice to support and recognise female artists in an equal and democratic way.
Jennifer French
Persimmons 1985
cibachrome print
295 x 190mm
The ways in which Edith Amituanai’s work contributes to a discussion on women’s suffrage are both subtle and obvious. This work, *Monsieur Murphy Pavihi Tavele*, from *Déjeuner* is, on the surface, a hymn to masculinity – what is more macho than the figure of a muscular rugby player? Yet, beneath the muddy top soil, lies a symphony of marginalised identities whispering the ideals of equality.

Fruit of a scholarship the artist undertook in 2006 to France and Italy, we can speak of a “third culture” in the context of this work. A third culture is not one that is either male, female or somewhere in between, but reflects the practices and situation of a temporary and transitory immigrant. One of the effects of globalisation is that we are often forced to follow the employment opportunities wherever they may lie. Here, on the other side of the world, this professional sportsman is far from the familiarity of Mamma’s table and of friends and fanau. The title of the series, *Déjeuner* (the French word for lunch), came from one of the players who spoke of a certain nostalgia of Sunday lunch at grandmother’s table where loved ones would congregate and connect.

The culture Edith is alluding to here, that of the spectacle of male virility, is temporality interrupted and given a breather. Although sporting all the attributes of a professional athlete, Murphy Pavihi Tavele is a proletariat manual worker like the rest of us. Edith has stopped him abruptly in his tracks, not to tackle him, but to put him under a different kind of spotlight. Far from the high-performance aesthetic of commercial spectacle and competition, Edith shines a light on the personal, the intimate, on the humanist and humanising aspects such as vulnerability, of us all.

As much about immigration and globalisation, this work reverses conventional perceptions of what it means to be a man. The women’s suffrage movement, 125 years ago, was also concerned with reversing and enlarging a certain idea of what it meant to be a woman. Artists often express the sentiment of being on the bottom of a mall, of being rucked in the back. As long as we’re all playing the same game, one where the rules are the same for us all, that’s OK. However, what is not OK, is when we are being held down and kicked by a social context that pretends so much yet delivers so little. We, on the wing, are (still) not being passed the ball!
Edith Amituanai (born 1980)

Monsieur Murphy Paschi Tavele,
from Déjeuner, 2007
C-type photograph
900 x 1040mm
International Women’s Year recalls the generation of protest and change, the many movements leading towards a celebration of diversity and difference. Albrecht draws on her interest in architecture, creating a window for us. The tilting frame, at times not quite coming together, is a metaphor for the frame with which we look at social progress, or through which we can view this poster.

A frame with which we can view this print is its commissioning. The Zonta Club, a women’s organisation, commissioned this work to celebrate the first International Women’s Day declared by the United Nations on 8th March 1875. Albrecht draws upon the Zonta logo in her zig-zagged lines, and inscribes their details upon the top of the print. An abstracted bird can be seen in each the white and pink forms, a visual link to the traditional symbol for days commemorating women – the dove.

Albrecht is well known for her abstract expressionist paintings and prints. This work’s clear delineation of colour differs from her later works, yet her skill in evocation with colour remains. The impassioned red, paired with a subdued green, in parallel a combination of loud and quiet, such as the qualities our voices take on in activism. The pink and blue plays with traditional male and female colour signifiers – through creating colour harmony we are considering the harmonisation of gendered difference. Albrecht has left some of herself in the work, stating in an interview about later paintings “The huge skies that we’ve got in New Zealand and surrounded by all this water, we can’t but not be affected by it”.

Placing the blue above the pink places the women of the work within New Zealand – it may have been International Women’s Year, but that it was New Zealand’s women’s year over here.

The mysterious woman Albrecht has dedicated this work to could be Una Platts, the pioneering art historian who recorded and researched early New Zealand artists, all whilst working in the male dominated art world of the 1950s. This short inscription creates a personal connection between Albrecht and the women who came before her, their influence on her studies and practice, and their role in bringing society to this point in 1975.

Viewing this work in 2018 brings forth a stream of emotion: sadness, disappointment, anger, melancholy, incredulity. That 2018 should be another “year of women” as there was in 1993 and 1975 and 1893. 43 years since this poster, how far has society progressed? Each year of the women promises more voice, more agency, more progress, yet here we are in the age of #metoo. We are not there yet, and we should say so.
Gretchen Albrecht
(born 1943)
*International Women's Year 1975*
silk screen print
900 x 635 cm

INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN’S YEAR 1975
Exploring the stylistic overlap between the realism of a conventional still life and contemporary abstract painting, this work depicts the visual strain of the dynamic power of wringing. The tension escalates further with the title-image counterpoint. “Bad-tempered violent woman” is the dictionary definition of a virago, portrayed here through a picture of a domestic chore. The fabric is seen in extreme close-up against a flat picture plane, representing the magnitude and immediacy of the issue. While women are getting increasingly involved in male-dominated industries and the pay gap is being narrowed, the division of labour over the domestic chores of the household do not seem to be following the same trends in the struggle for equality. Although there is no biological determinant or gender disposition to do the dishes or clean the toilets, women are still expected to plan, manage and mostly execute household work. The grey mundane colours of the painting are there to convey that you will never reach a satisfying feeling of completion or accomplishment. It is impossible. A woman’s work is never done. That nagging woman, the virago, is assigned to do a Sisyphean job, of endless repetition.

Like any great piece of art, Virago is open to interpretation, and has a multi-layered meaning with many contextual possibilities. When asked what Virago means personally to her, Jude Rae says: “I think my interpretation of the painting might be a case of shutting the door after the horse has bolted. I tend to think that the viewer completes the work and time will tell… That said, ‘virago’ is one of those words the meaning of which has changed over time. An archaic positive meaning shifts to a negative modern meaning, and as such it brackets interpretive poles between which women continue to be hung out to dry”.

So, what is the painting about? Is it a real washing, or is it a metaphor for the constant pressure women are under to prove themselves, striving to accomplish themselves in a man’s world. Is it a social critique of a gender power push-pull struggle? Or maybe Virago is about an exhausted couple, who cannot stop squeezing each other out until someone drops out of the relationship deadlock?

In any case, the strain is there and the struggle is going on. Virago, the nagging woman, is not complacent. She is frustrated, and she expresses her dissatisfaction by applying all of a virago’s might to her washing. Every wring is a slight move forward. However, we are not quite there yet. Tension is on the borderline with an eruption. One more powerful wring is required, and the picture frame will burst, tearing apart the socially prescribed gender roles and internalised gender expectations.
Jude Rae (born 1956)
Virago, 1994
Oil on canvas
1220 x 1845mm
Two faces stand out from the crowd. As if their facial features weren’t enough to distinguish them, Kathryn Maxwell has circled them emphatically in a heavy, hand drawn line. She wants us to notice them and the way she has defined them makes them more important than any other. Arrows point from one masculine face to the other and back again, indicating a circular, exclusive conversation. Why is it that the only voices visibly audible belong to men?

Behind these vocal males are row upon row of silent onlookers. For a crowd, they are conspicuously quiet. They face different ways, suggesting different and individual perspectives, yet on closer inspection it appears some of these disembodied heads are Pop Art-like repetitions, versions of selves articulated in an off-key rainbow colour palette.

Mouths closed, tacit, their vibrantly coloured silhouettes designate them as two-dimensional, reminiscent of cameo jewellery and the monarchical portraits of postage stamps and currency. A reference to the patriarchal traditions of our society? Or perhaps a nod to Victorian England; a time when women were supposed to be seen, but not heard.

A couple in the top left in black and white go head to head, mouths open, simultaneously talking and not listening. What is it they’re saying? And who is the woman in pink with the fancy headdress? Clearly someone of significance. There, down the bottom a single tiny feminine figure dances, for joy? Or stuck in an archaic stereotype? Like miniature ballerinas trapped in little girl’s jewellery boxes. Maxwell’s print throws up a multitude of questions, demanding the viewer consider aesthetic choices, symbolism and reference.

*Say So* is an exhibition about voice and this screen print by Maxwell points to inequalities in the way the female voice is represented and heard. *Faces in the crowd* generally refers to those who are unknown, or unrecognised in the public eye. The way Maxwell has chosen to represent male and female figures in her work draws attention to the way that women have often been rendered invisible by society, their opinions disregarded and voices drowned out.

In the arts, and elsewhere, the male voice has long been the dominant one. Even now, when an overwhelming majority of Arts and Fine Arts graduates are female, still male voices dominate the field. Despite leading the way, and the world, with the Women’s Suffrage movement 125 years ago, gender inequality in New Zealand remains.
Kathryn Maxwell
*Faces in the Crowd 2015*
Screenprint
559 x 762
Immigrant emits its own energy. It is bold, and loud; the artist’s name is hard to spot against its crashing blues and reds. As a contemporary Pacific artist, all of Glenda Vilisoni’s works are highly personal, revolving around issues of identity and culture. Born in Alofi, Niue, Vilisoni migrated with her family to New Zealand in 1969, and, as a multi-media artist, has explored themes of immigration and diaspora in paint, print-making, and sculpture. This piece is no different. In its colourful montage of image and text, Immigrant radiates like fallout from a nuclear, cultural explosion. It jumps at you with vigour. The reds and yellows are so brazen they look like magma, burning with anger and passion.

Vilisoni hadn’t looked at the work in a while when I called to ask her about it. The emotion struck her vividly, and she called the process of its creation therapeutic – it felt important for her to get her feelings out at the time. Made in 1990 for an exhibition at the Otara Music and Arts centre, the work was part of a larger series, and isolated here, it carries a history familiar to thousands of New Zealanders. It documents the turbulent journey Vilisoni’s parents undertook as they moved from Niue to New Zealand – “the land of milk and honey” – in order to provide better opportunities for their children. This artwork commemorates their sacrifice and the toll it took on her mother, who “felt alienated and isolated here” and fell into a deep, long-lasting depression. Her face is in the repeated photograph on the left, gazing outwards as if into the past. The black and white quality of her image cements an idea of permanent nostalgia, of being trapped in history.

Niuean motifs are scattered around the edges of the work, disparate segments of a broken cultural connection. Scribbles of blue interrupt the red passages around these motifs and photographs, hinting at a sadness resting below a righteous anger. Vilisoni was once told that she had to be a frustrated artist because of how much she liked layers. This work is no exception - the montage of photographs over oils over acrylics builds into a complex composition of multiple emotions. “It’s never been a flat piece of paper or canvas,” she explains when asked about the medium. “I like texture.” There is something about layering that is innately Pacific, she says. Maintaining a connection to her culture has always been of great significance to Vilisoni, hence the writing in Niuean language. Its stark whiteness seems still against the chaos of the background. She requested it remain untranslated. The exclusivity of English and academic writing are to be inverted, and you, as the viewer, are no longer qualified to understand what is written right in front of you. You are asked to feel alienated and isolated, just as her mother did.

This work is important when we consider the history of women in New Zealand. Not all women experience the same struggles, and we must remain cognisant of this fact as we celebrate 125 years of women’s suffrage in a multicultural country. When we highlight stories of feminism in this country, whose voices do we champion? Which ones get drowned out? Who is ignored, dismissed because of a difference in language?
Glenda Vilisoni  
(born 1965)  
Immigrant 1995  
oilstick, acrylic & mixed media on unstretched canvas  
1300 x 1850mm
Created in a time when the male painter was considered the powerhouse of art, Painting No. 6 A Step up the Ladder boldly questions the difficult journey faced by many female artists hoping for recognition in their field. Wheels, wings and ladders reference a desire for change and evolution from the oppressive artistic climate in Auckland, where women might be able to move forward and rise above the prejudices inflicted upon them.

The symbolism of the ladder and ‘stepping up’ implies a climb, acknowledging that this pursuit was not and is not easy. Influenced by New Zealand and American Abstract Expressionists and painted masks, this work commands attention and will not stand down. Colourful juxtapositions enhance one another and bring to mind ideas about polarity and opposition. “The process of painting and graphic mark making was as much the content as the actual image”, says Glasgow, pointing to the importance of the artistic practice as a process, not only a resulting image.

Painting No. 6 A Step up the Ladder as an artwork exemplifies the difficult road to creation that many artists endure in order to express their ideas, feelings and desires. Glasgow describes “conscious and unconscious divide between being a male and female students at Elam, and then in the space of trying to sell and exhibit works during and post-study.” This highlights that the struggle to succeed as a woman artist extended (and still extends) beyond the classroom context and into the art market. The teaching staff also consisted mainly of men, at least in the painting classes (as opposed to some other media such as sculpture and photography, where female tutors predominated), setting the tone for further artistic endeavours within and beyond the university.

I do not believe that it is anyone’s fault that the art world favours male painters above all, but I do insist that we create space for woman artists and allow their voices to be heard. Exhibiting a show of predominantly female artists is one small act to help level the metaphorical playing field of Auckland’s art scene and make women artists’ climb a little easier.

On the 125th anniversary of Women’s Suffrage, we commemorate the courageous people who stood up for women’s right to vote. We should feel proud to be one of the first countries to attain this right and acknowledge women as equal counterparts to men. However, it is important to remember that not all New Zealand women achieved this right in 1893. Māori, Pasifika and Asian women only gained the right to vote in later years. Remembering this illustrates the step-by-step process we take to attain equality, and continue to take as we move forward as a nation.
Nicky Glasgow. (born 1967)
_Painting no. 6: A Step Up The Ladder 1988_
Oil and pencil on paper
1080 x 750mm
Inspired by feminism in the 1970s, Jane Zusters emerged as a political artist in a male-dominated art world. *Untitled (triptych)* sets up a dialogue between two women, addressing the recent past as well as the future. Do women have equal rights in modern society? If it is a fact, why don’t you say so?

New Zealand has been a leader in women’s equality since 1893. Women’s voices have gradually come to be heard more often in the following century. Zusters is one of the female figurative artists who were involved with the women’s art movement. They worked to integrate the achievements of women artists into the mainstream art world. She grew up in a conservative family, and was educated in a rigid system, but decided to push beyond the traditional barriers. She emerged as an artist inspired by feminism in 1976. It was still a male-dominated art scene where women were not encouraged and supported to be artists. According to Juliet Batten, to declare yourself to be a feminist writer or feminist artist was “to sign one’s death warrant”. This suggests that more courage and determination was required to be a leading voice for women back then than today.

Influenced by Italian neo-expressionism, Zusters uses abstract forms and expressive metaphors in this work. Earlier works are bold in colour and deal with contemporary issues. In *Portrait of a Woman Marrying Herself* (1978), Zusters challenges the old notions of marriage and the institutions of the Christian church. With *Pink Nude in Blue Pool* (1980) and other photographs, she focuses on touching “one’s unconscious self”. Then in *Untitled triptych* (1987), Zusters uses white graffiti-like sketches on the black canvas, combining both abstraction and figuration in a multilayered painting.

The first panel depicts Zusters’ spiritual home, Christchurch, which is presented as a conservative environment belonging to her past. It is also a reflection of the era, when a woman becoming an artist meant abandoning the traditional life of wifedom and motherhood. Then there is a gaze between two people in the middle, which refers to the present. For the artist, an open attitude is embodied in this scene. A hypothetical dialogue can be constructed and an expectation about the future can be sensed. The final part of the triptych focuses on the future. Doppelganger symbols for the artist appear in all three panels, and in the second scene, they become the outlines of two women. They are face to face, and smiling at each other. The background is dark and depressing, but the two figures are seemingly enjoying a conversation. A glimpse of bright colour shows on each panel, contrasting with the black-and-white atmosphere, and indicating emotional factors— the resonance of past times, a perspective on a new life, and the insistence on the construction of dialogues. Jane Zusters’s art practice is not simply concerned with the peace movement and feminism. She explores relationships between women and men, women and women and the world.

According to Zusters, “being a feminist enabled me to become an artist.” The struggle of women’s equality and her striving for art mark the particular situation of politics and art in New Zealand thirty-years ago. Now, there is no spare room to negotiate about the current state of women’s equality. And if you think so, just say so.
Jane Zusters (b.1951)
*Untitled (triptych)* 1987
acrylic on canvas
1830 x 1110mm
This catalogue was produced to accompany the exhibition “Say so: voices of protest and pause”,
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