

From the collection

Art

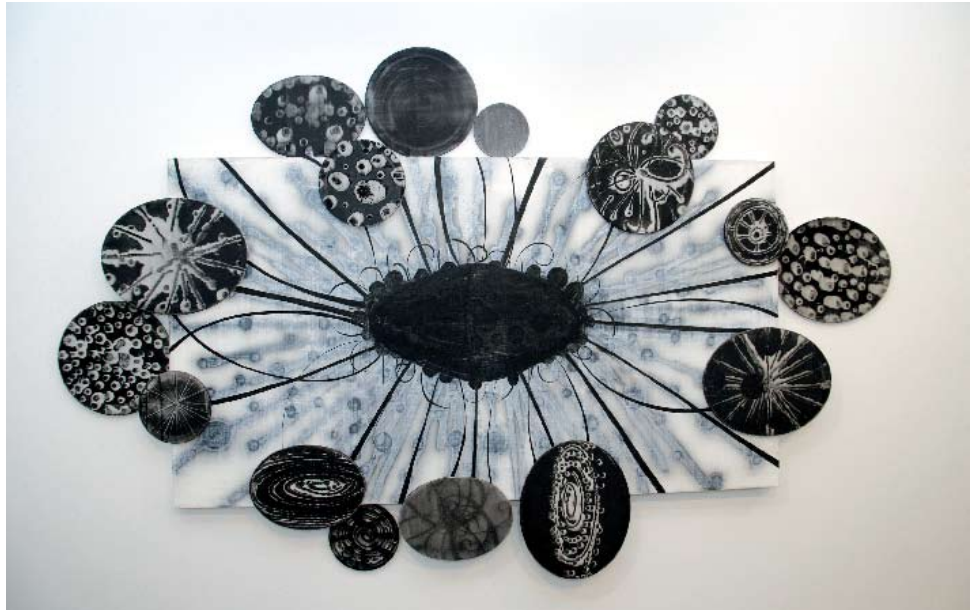
The recurring watery forms of Luise Fong's paintings can be related back to an early childhood experience of almost drowning, a memory she associates with a blissful suspension in time and space.

This drifting sensation is something she would later explore in the liquid processes of painting.

Born in Malaysia in 1964, Fong moved to New Zealand as a child and was taught by sculptor Marte Szirmay at Epsom Girls' Grammar School before studying textile design in Wellington. She later enrolled at Elam School of Fine Arts where she majored in printmaking.

Fong's work evokes the human body and organic forms, not through any strategy of depiction but by her exploration of the materiality of painting. Preferring to pour, spill and stain her surfaces, she creates drifting, diaphanous imagery through the traces of painterly marks that resemble the laboratory swabs of a pathologist. Further clues for forensic examination can also be found in fingerprints left on the sides of some works, or cuts and perforations made through her canvases, rupturing the surface of the skin. It is no coincidence that she was reading Patricia D. Cornwell detective novels at the time she was preparing her 1993 *Pathology* exhibition.

In 1994 she was joint winner of the prestigious BNZ Visa Art Award and that same year was artist-in-residence at Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne. The following year she took part in a residency at the Govett Brewster Art Gallery, where she produced a suite of four major works including *Cluster*, purchased soon after for The University of Auckland Art Collection. It had been shown in the subsequent Govett-Brewster



Luise Fong (b.1964), Cluster, 1995, Acrylic on board and canvas, 1702 x 2800mm, The University of Auckland Art Collection.

exhibition, "More Human", along with decomposing eggs in plastic containers (*Nostalgia*), plasticene on board (*Touch*), and photograms of translucent or patterned domestic containers including a rice steamer and drinking glass (*Render*).

Like the imagery of *Cluster*, the cloudy abstracts of the photograms resemble x-rays or specimen slides. *Cluster* is more familiar, constructed on canvas and comprising Luise Fong's trademark dribbling smudges, which resemble both swirling constellations and spawning cells.

Cluster is included in the Gus Fisher Gallery's exhibition "The Swarm", which runs until 16 August, and also features work from Douglas Bagnall, Gregory Bennett, Philip Dadson, Richard Killeen, Matt Molloy, Ani O'Neill and Elizabeth Thomson. The exhibition draws together work that has a viral quality, creating a tension between individual entities and their role as part of a larger organism or community.

Fong will be artist-in-residence at the McCahon House in Titirangi this summer.

Andrew Clifford