



## Sendai Exhibition

Although the aftermath of the Christchurch earthquake pales into insignificance when compared with events in Northern Japan, we can, however, note that in best of times, in capitalist societies, the arts are frequently pushed to the margins. In a natural disaster the arts community is among the most vulnerable, but being by nature entrepreneurial and adaptable, the arts are among the first things to spring back to kick-start the healing process. *Shared Lines: Christchurch/Sendai Art Exchange* is part of that for two cities which have both suffered greatly the wrath of unpredictable nature. We watch and wait as the brain of the city tries to reconnect around the damage of an unexpected aneurism.

The bringing of art from Christchurch to Sendai is a symbolic act of solidarity, sympathy and understanding from one seismically-scarred community to another. The various artworks take their inspiration from individual earthquake experiences, though sometimes tangentially. Brooke Georgia's *No and Know* (2011), for example, references the floor plan of her ruined home and studio. Tim Middleton's plaster cast of a baby's shoe (2012) suggests abandonment, and perhaps recalls some of the smaller and sadder fatalities of September 2010 and February 2011 Christchurch events. Marie le Lievre's *Barbiturate* painting is a joking allusion to the prevalence of mood medications in the city following the disaster.

Although Miranda Parkes' sculptural painting *Splitter* was made in 2008, its form suggests the tectonic plates moving far beneath the ocean. The works of Cristina Silaghi, Gaby Montejo, Mirabel Oliver, and Adrienne Milwood all suggest a sense of fractured landscape and chaotic interior, or the ephemerality and fleeting nature of material possessions and stability. Kim Lowe's print incorporates a Maori motif, a reference to her children's cultural inheritance that also hints at the concept of stewardship held sacred by the indigenous people of New Zealand and suggested grace notes of nature. Nature at its most exquisite nature also appears in Rebecca Smallridge's work. Matt Akehurst's biomorphic abstract sculptures seem to cry out in existential terror.

This is just a brief sampling of the works by the thirty artists in this exhibition – a project of considerable size and aesthetic heft. The artists represented reflect the closeness of Christchurch's artistic community, its loyalty to the broken city, and its resilience. Christchurch's art scene is one of the longest established in New Zealand, closely associated with the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts, the oldest art school in the British Commonwealth outside of the United Kingdom. It is a vibrant community that shares and exchanges ideas constantly. Most of New Zealand's preeminent artists have close connections to the city and its institutions. This exhibition represents the broadest representation of cultural practice in Christchurch, from celebrated practitioners to the not so well known.

Each work, appropriate for people who have lost so much, is whatever can be carried and easily transported in ordinary luggage; fragments of an art scene from a city where the cultural heritage is also reduced to fragments. The Sendai/Christchurch exchange is an acknowledgement of our shared geographical relationship with the Pacific Ring of Fire, and our desire to express empathy through a shared and universal language of art. This is cultural achievement in post-tragedy environments bridging 9611.7 Kilometres of Pacific Ocean in a very genuine and heartfelt project. Christchurch will likewise be honoured to receive a reciprocal exhibition of work by Japanese artists the following year.

In times of trial and tribulation, the artists of the world should draw strength from each other.

Andrew Paul Wood, 2012