

Melissa Laing is a artist, theorist and curator living in West Auckland. The physical form of her art spans film, dialogue, sculpture, conceptual writing and artist books. Intellectually her practice is situated in the intersections of visual language, critical theory, social history and politics. Previous works have focused on the construction of insecurity through the lens of immigration and aviation. More recently she has focussed on the structures that shape how knowledge is gained and shared. Through artworks, essays and conversation groups she has engaged with the ideologies of intellectual property, the practises of education, and the role of science in New Zealand. Since 2012 Melissa has been the lead researcher for the Performance Ethics Working Group, an initiative of the University Without Conditions. She has a PhD from Sydney College of Arts, University of Sydney and her writing has been published in magazines, academic journals and galleries. Currently she is the director of the Urban Walking Festival and the Whau Community Arts Broker.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- Solo
- Controlled Environment Laboratory, Corban Estate Arts Centre, Auckland, New Zealand, 2018 & Te Manawa, Palmerston North, New Zealand, 2019
 - Newsland, The Rumpus Room, Melbourne, Australia, 2013
 - a small metal pin, a piece of rubber, a section of metal pipe with securing nut, two red engine plugs and red ribbon, a reverse thruster hatch stopper bush, some down strapping, a signal horn, a piece of brake lining, a screwdriver, a broken omni directional threshold light, multiple bird, bat and turtle carcasses, a plastic water bottle, a block of wood, a beer can and a piece of paper, Blue Oyster, Dunedin, New Zealand, 2010
 - Melissa Laing : Thirty Two Heavy, SCA Gallery, Sydney, Australia, 2008
 - A video, a tent and accessories, Rm 103, Auckland, New Zealand, 2004
 - Harbouring I by Tentline, Damm4, Vienna, Austria, 2003
 - Shifted Rotating Door, Mercer Union, Toronto, Canada, 2003
 - The City's Open Spaces, Einsichten Ausblicke, Display Window, Kastanienallee, Berlin, Germany, 2002
 - Epic(2), Physics Room, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2001
 - The Interior, The Trace, rm212, Auckland, New Zealand, 2000
 - Epic/Episch, Video Screening, Basis Wien, Vienna, Austria, 2000
 - He regarded the elements of fiction as the cards in the pack. They were always all there. There was no surprise; solitaire always came out if you cheated, Lift Space, High Street Project, Christchurch, New Zealand, 1999
- Group
- Hither and Thither, Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand, 2013
 - Make Something, A Collection of Collaboration, Saatchi Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand, 2011
 - Species of Space, Westspace, Melbourne, Australia, 2009
 - Underbelly, Carriageworks, Sydney, Australia, 2008
 - Limn file, High Street Project, Christchurch, New Zealand and China Heights, Sydney, Australia, 2007
 - Post it, Peloton Gallery, Sydney, Australia, 2006
 - JOC Jewelry Out Of Context, The Muse, Sydney, Australia, 2006
 - Tourist City, Kulturzentrum Schlachthof, Bremen, Germany, 2004
 - International Stopover, Pugh Pugh Barney McGrew Cuthbert Dibble Grubb, Berlin, Germany, 2003
 - Experimental, Museu de Arte Contemporânea do Ceará, Fortaleza Ceará, Brazil, 2003
 - Surviving Berlin, Jewelbox Projektraum, Berlin, Germany, 2003
 - Sempur Sursam, Te Manawa, Palmerston North, New Zealand, 2002
 - Ritual Comforters, High St Project, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2002
 - Starting Now, Four gallery exhibition, Sixty4Steps, Toronto, Canada, 2002
 - Hide and Seek, Villa Weiner, Ochtrup, Germany, 2001
 - Goggle Box, Light Box, Auckland, New Zealand, 2001
 - Rezone: Our Generation, Central Post Office, Auckland, New Zealand, 2000
 - Open Studios, Artists in Residence House, Vienna, Austria, 2000
 - Up and Coming, Articule Gallery, Montreal, Canada, 2000
 - Fairytale, Centre for Metamedia-Plasy, Czech Republic, 1999
 - Inappropriate Occupations and Transient Preservations: Here Today, Gone Tomorrow, Public Art Project, Rezone, Auckland, New Zealand, 1999

Projects & Performances Standing at the edge, with Mustaq Missouri, Walking about, Te Uru, Auckland, 2020
The Stoat, the Kereru and the Karaka Berries, with Christina Houghton, Auckland Fringe Festival, 2019
Boat Date, Auckland Fringe Festival, 2018
Performance Ethics Working Group, University Without Conditions, Auckland, ongoing since 2012
Boat Dates, with Christina Houghton, Auckland waterways, 2016
dull, dull, dull. Interesting people talk about boring things, Auckland Fringe Festival, 2013
Happiness in two parts, Video with live monologue, Vive le Bonheur, Workshop Showroom, Sydney, Australia, 2007
A Turbulent Mind, Direction & Sound: Melissa Laing, Performance: Paul Gonzalez & Nick Nestorovski, Nighttime #1, a Night of Short Works, Performance Space, Sydney, Australia, 2007
Shopping Mall (2002), 2.30 min section of Track 2 from, Trip, remix your experience, a visual music-film with live performance which was shot over 4 years in 12 countries and incorporates 4 feature-length films, 36 directors and 14 musicians. Directed by Frank Otto and Bernt Koehler-Adams. Premiered Expo 2005 in Aichi, Japan. Hamburg Film Festival 2005, European premiere, 59th Festival de Cannes, Marché du Film, 2006. Toured Germany 2006.

Reviews & Publications Johannes Klabbers, "Not the void exactly: Species of Spaces", Art Monthly Australia (#229, May 2010)
Adrian Blackwell, Spinning off Orbit, Mercer Union Exhibition Catalogue, Toronto, Canada, 2003
Thomas Hirschmann, White room, Now, Toronto, January 23-29, p 69, 2003
Emma Bugden (ed.), Physics Room Annual 2001, Physics Room Trust, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2002
Denise Carvalho (ed.), Fairy-tales, Centre for Metamedia-Plasy, Plasy, Czech Republic, 1999

PUBLICATIONS

Page Works, Artist Books, Conceptual Writing 'A Report on Progress', bookwork, 148 pp, 2018
'Untitled (for Victoria)', bookwork, 2017
Boat Date, a poster and essay, 2016
'Reduction', video poem for Art West, 2015 <https://vimeo.com/142360327>
'Wrong In The World' vol I - IV, zine 2015 - 16
'Climate Laboratory Newsletter', zine, 2014
'These undesirable immigrants, lunatics, people on these boats. we do not want these people to come - and I make no apology for it', bookwork for Enjoy Public Art Gallery, 2013
'Commonly Occurring', a book of edited text from the Australian Transport Safety Bureau Aviation Safety Database, August 2010 to August 2011. 2012
'Manifestos for thinking and living', with Sarah Laing, 2011

Edited Books About walking, 15 months of artist walks in Tāmaki Auckland, Te Uru, 2021
Negotiating Conversational Frequency, Performance Ethics Working Group Report July 2017, University Without Conditions, 2017
978-0-9864650-5-5, ST PAUL St Publishing, 2012

Podcasts Episode 1 - 9 Performance Ethics Working Group, University Without Conditions, Auckland, New Zealand. universitywithoutconditions.ac.nz/?page_id=492, 2014

Selected Essays 'Shaking the snow-globe and changing the city' Cameron Catiere and Leon Tan (eds.) Routledge Companion to Art in the Public Realm, Routledge, 2020
'Some parallel discussions' in Bruce E. Phillips (ed) Share/Cheat/Unite vol 4, Te Tuhi, 2018
'The (quieter) romance of suburban rail', Pantograph Punch, 02 March, 2017
'Being here, with you' in Bruce E. Phillips (ed) Unstuck in Time, Te Tuhi, 2015
'Out at Sea: On Taking a Year off and Building a Boat' Pantograph Punch, 4 June 2015
'Slippery Questions: Ethics in Art', Pantograph Punch, 14 October 2014
'Under a Flag', What do you mean, we? Te Tuhi, 2012
'Negotiating an ethical commons of expression' 978-0-9864650-5-5, ST PAUL St Publishing, 2012
'In My Empty House: Ruark Lewis with Loma Bridge', Studies in Material Thinking Vol. 5, 2011
'Into a void', Revolutions per Minute, Narrow Gauge, 2011

SELECTED CURATORIAL PROJECTS

Urban Walking Festival, Tāmaki Auckland, 2019 - 2021, urbanwalking.nz
About walking, 15 months of walking artworks, co-curated by Christina Houghton and presented by Te Uru, Auckland, New Zealand, 2019 - 2020
Tasting Words, a Poetry and Food Walk on Great North Rd, New Lynn, Auckland, 2017, Whau Arts Broker
New Lynn Street Performance Series, Auckland, Winter 2016 & 2017, Whau Arts Broker
Waterview Connection, Dianne Smith, Alan Wood Reserve, Auckland, 2017, Whau Arts Broker
Sounding the Whau, sound walks in collaboration with Audio Foundation, Kelston, Auckland, 2016 & Green Bay, Auckland, 2017, Whau Arts Broker
Assembly, co-curated with Charlotte Huddleston and Vera Mey, 2012, St Paul St Gallery, AUT
Print Season 2011, a season of four curated exhibitions, a print fair, a symposium and a publication, St Paul St Gallery, AUT
In My Empty House, Ruark Lewis with Loma Bridge, 2010, St Paul St Gallery, AUT
Bricolage Disco, Wade Marynowsky, 2010, St Paul St Gallery, AUT
Sculpture Season 2010, a season of six curated exhibitions, St Paul St Gallery, AUT
New Work for Screen, commissioned video artworks for Air New Zealand's Inflight Entertainment, 2013
Blick-Box, window gallery Friedrichshain, Berlin, 2003
Einsichten Ausblicke, window gallery, Kastanienallee, Berlin, 2002
Rezone, pop up exhibitions across Auckland, 1998 - 2000

RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS & RESIDENCIES

Review of the Copyright Act, a one week focus on Copyright in response to the MBIE review of the Copyright Act, St Paul St Gallery, AUT, 2019
On Conversation, a research residency at Te Tuhi Gallery, Auckland, 2016
Henry Moore Institute Research Fellowship, Leeds, 2012
Trinity Grammar School, Artist in Residence, Sydney, 2007
Scholarship for Language and Cultural Exchange, Goethe Institute, Berlin, 2001
Huygens Scholarship, Postgraduate Study in the Netherlands, Dutch Art Institute, Enschede, 2001
Federal Chancellery of Austria & UNESCO-ASHBERG Bursaries for Artists, Vienna, 2000
Centre for Metamedia-Plasy Residency, Czech Republic, 1999

SELECTED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Cities in a Climate of Change: Public Art, Environmental and Social Ecologies, IAPA Conference 2015, Auckland, New Zealand 2015
Cultural Studies Association Australasia (CSAA) Conference 2014, Wollongong, Australia 2014
Postcolonial Studies Research Network Conference, Citizenship in an Era of Global Crisis, University of Otago, Dunedin, 2011
6th European Consortium for Political Research General Conference, University of Iceland, 2011
32nd Congress of the International Committee of the History of Art (CIHA), Melbourne University, Australia, 2008
Art Association of Australia and New Zealand Annual Conference 2012, 2009, 2006

EDUCATION

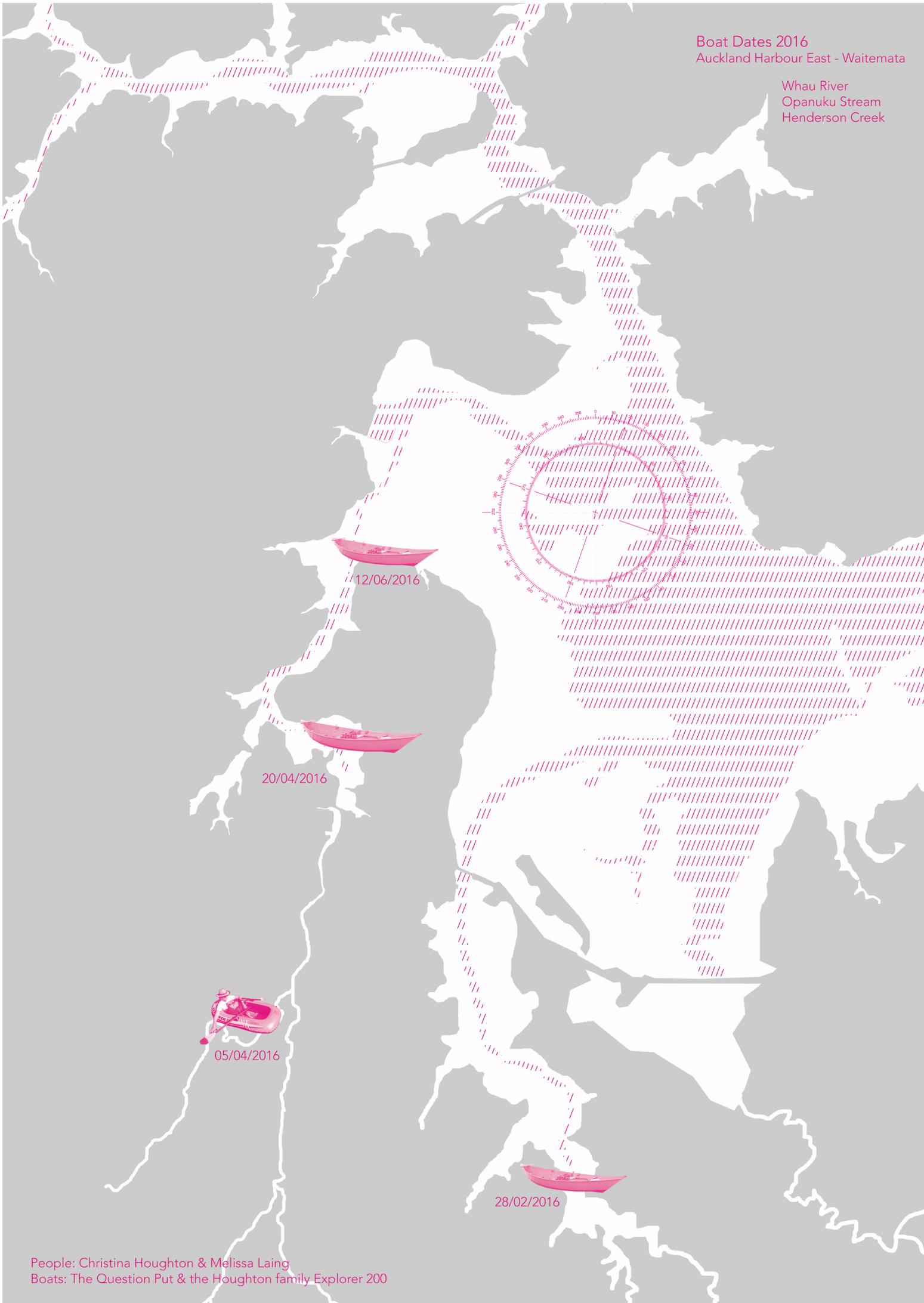
PhD, University of Sydney, Australia. 2008
Postgraduate study, Dutch Art Institute, The Netherlands. 2001
Bachelor of Visual Arts, Auckland Institute of Technology, New Zealand. 1998

PANELS & MENTORING

Mahia Atua Advisory Panel, Arts Regional Trust
Temp° Advisory Panel, a biennial outdoor art science climate change event
E-Press Advisory Panel, Unitec
Artists Alliance Mentor, 2016 & 2017

Boat Dates 2016
Auckland Harbour East - Waitemata

Whau River
Opanuku Stream
Henderson Creek



The air pump whined, its mis-fitting nozzle taped to the valve with duct tape. As we inflated the Explorer 200 row boat we watched a troupe of children in matching burgundy tops pass by and congregate on the lawn to hear a historic society volunteer talk about the restored mill race. 10 am in the morning on a school day. Once inflated we collected our hats and bags, closed the car doors and carried the boat over the bridge where we picked our way across the rocks to launch it in the water of Opanuku Stream just above the falls. This was our second boat date. One of a series of adventures on the waters around Auckland in small vessels.

The Opanuku Stream wends its way from high in the Waitakere Ranges down through the Henderson Valley before joining the tidal waters of Henderson Creek just below the falls. In 2002 a team from New Zealand National Geographic has spent four days navigating it from head water to sea mouth. Our trip was slightly less ambitious. The intention was to see how far up Opanuku Stream we could get in an inflatable boat.

It was Christina's turn to row.

She assembled the small black and yellow plastics paddles and threaded them through the oarlocks and settled herself in the boat. Ready I pushed off and we wobbled carefully across the first pool of water towards the bend that would take us out of sight of the road. In the summer holidays if you look down as you walk over the bridge you can see kids playing in this swimming hole. People looking down in that moment would have seen us, two adults, precariously perched on the upper slopes of the inflated sides of a children's dinghy suddenly realising how surprisingly deep the Opanuku Stream can be. As Christina propelled the boat forward using a stroke she dubbed 'micro-rowing' the urban setting disappeared behind the high banks and bushes that edged the stream. We moved surprisingly fast against the current.

In this first, open yet sheltered section of the stream the bushes reach far down the banks and hang their lower branches into the water, thickets of Kikuyu grass emerging between them. From amongst the bushes and grass the Tī Kōuka or Cabbage Trees rear up, their distinctive spear leaves waving in the sun. Despite knowing that just through the trees was the Pak 'n Save carpark this urban stream felt truly far away from the Henderson shops.

Our passage upstream was soon interrupted by the first of many tangles of fallen trees catching up debris in the water. Each partial dam collecting a combination of vegetation and urban waste - plastic bags, fast food containers and discarded packaging, as well as rags and t-shirts. Where we could we edged around the drifts of piled up wood, holding down branches to avoid snagging our boat's skin. Sometimes we couldn't find a way through and had to spend time disentangling branches, lifting and shoving parts of the pile until a passage became clear and then pausing to allow the rubbish to wash past.

As we went further along we got into a stop-start pattern of progress. Negotiating our way over the numerous small rapids by carefully climbing out of the boat, balancing our belongings and passing it between each other as we found stable ground to stand on. The lightness of the inflatable made traversing these rocky stretches easy, offsetting the difficulty of getting back into the tippy wallowing vessel. We passed under the old concrete walls that hold up Great North Rd on foot but were able to row under the iron trusses of the railway bridge before moving into the more heavily forested portion of the stream between two reserves.

By now we'd been travelling for an hour up stream.



Boat Date, Auckland Fringe Festival, 2018



Reduction, 2015, a video poem <https://vimeo.com/142360327>

/ fire
on a string /
on a rag

'Commonly Occurring' documents reported aviation safety occurrences in Australia between August 2010 and August 2011, ranging from items and carcasses found on the runway and entries onto the runway and taxiway without clearance, to fires, spurious alarms and mechanical and electrical failures. The publication explores the literary form of risk management, in particular the deceptive banality and formal awkwardness of routine reporting.

Publication concept and design by Melissa Laing

Material drawn from the Australian Transport Safety Bureau Aviation Safety Database, August 2010 to August 2011.

Published by Laing Publishing, 2012.

Pages: 156

An engineering inspection revealed:

the oil in the un-feathering accumulator had bled down to a level insufficient to un-feather the propeller,
the fuel control unit was faulty,
the oil filler cap had not been correctly secured,
fuel leaking from the fuel manifold,
the right engine high pressure fuel line was chafed at the point that it passes through the engine fire wall,
a blocked fuel injector in one cylinder,
fuel mismanagement by the pilot,
the refuelling panel had been left open,
a faulty exhaust gas temperature compensator,
a snapped fuel line to one of the left cylinders,
oil was leaking from the rear gearbox housing through a hole that resulted from corrosion,
the unmetered fuel was lower than the specified limits,
the engine failed due to fuel starvation,
an oil line had fractured,
an unserviceable oil pressure transducer,
the oil sump plug was missing,
the oil cooler had split,
oil had leaked from the engine but the source of the leak could not be detected.

Commonly Occurring:

ATC issued a clearance to the incorrect aircraft
(both aircraft had similar call signs).
The controller did not detect the error
until the first 737 crew asked
if the instruction was meant for them.

A descent clearance was passed by ATC to the wrong
aircraft without ensuring an appropriate separation
standard was in place.

a small metal pin, a piece of rubber, a section of metal pipe with securing nut, two red engine plugs and red ribbon, a reverse thruster hatch stopper bush, some down strapping, a signal horn, a piece of brake lining, a screwdriver, a broken omni directional threshold light, multiple bird, bat and turtle carcasses, a plastic water bottle, a block of wood, a beer can and a piece of paper. 2010, Blue Oyster Project Space, Dunedin, New Zealand

“Melissa Laing takes the civil aviation industry as a topical example of modern society’s desperate pursuit for safety assurance. Her installation explores the products of this industry, which harness the generative power of paranoia; proliferating safety checklists, procedures, policies, maintenance schedules, wildlife abatement and incidence reporting. The title Laing has used for her show lists the variety of foreign objects found and recorded through runway inspections in Australia: a small metal pin, a piece of rubber, a section of metal pipe with securing nut, two red engine plugs and red ribbon, a reverse thruster hatch stopper bush, some down strapping, a signal horn, a piece of brake lining, a screwdriver, a broken omni-directional threshold light, multiple bird, bat and turtle carcasses, a plastic water bottle, a block of wood, a beer can and a piece of paper. Laing’s attention has narrowed in on the industry’s Rossetta Stone - the black box, audio and flight data recorders, which act as focal points for our morbid curiosity with disasters and our belief that they can be avoided. In a lab-like setting she presents the physical repercussions of this belief: smashed up black boxes alongside the animal life that has fallen victim to these technologies and anxieties.”

Jaenine Parkinson, 2010



The Aftermath of Romp V
Melissa Laing | Artist in Residence + Open Studio

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There was incredibly synchronicity with the topic and timing of Melissa's show to the political climate present in Australia. Two hours before I left for the opening my Facebook feed was covered in news feeds about K. Rudd and his policy to send Asylum seekers to Papua New Guinea. Media bait and feat mongering. Rudd and Abbott could toast glasses on this topic. The weeks paper in images have been fetishizing over the asylum seekers plight. It's dirty politics.

So back to the exhibition at hand, so to my knowledge Melissa collaborated with Ashlee Laing and gathered the support of Aussie artists to create a video work shot on a shore line in Williamstown. As I walked into the Rumpus room it was dark with the single projected stark video reel of a large ocean horizon line. It was quickly revealed that there were two figures in black wrestling, a male and female. I had the cold dark gallery to myself to watch the reel. The figures were nearly to scale and the backdrop was serene. The audio was near silent besides the sounds of exertion coming from the wrestling figures.

I found myself standing in the same stance as the obstructing large male figure thigh high in the ocean. A woman repetitively attempted to pass this strong unrelenting male but is thrown, pushed and dragged back into the water. It was relentless and exhausting, she can't get to shore. The weighty emotionality of the video was intense. It had that cinematic stance of giving the viewer the perspective view of the perpetrator – it was clever, I was uncomfortable. I thought of the term 'guilty by omission'. I watched the video's loop to see what would happen but there wasn't an ending, I left her standing in the water.

As moved out of the gallery I mingled in the social outdoor areas of the gallery I was surrounded by the familiar and the warmth of a fire. I was told there was a second part to the show with an installation in the 'vacant' block of land next to the gallery. I gathered with two others and some feeble torches and was led into the darkness. I'd seen this empty land, over grown, uneven with dumped debris from neighbours. It has an ironic glossy sales sign advertising its future transformation into modern apartments. It was very innovative of the artist to use this space, it is currently no mans land and bought another dimension taking the audience into an unknown space. A very visceral shift from watching a screen. My senses were heightened by the cold darkness of night.

Looking into the lot, one could faintly make out the glow sticks dangling in front of signs and what looked to be a lit up tent or camp ground in the distance. We walked from glow stick sign to sign with large words stenciled on them alluding to a dialogue. It was like a ghost trail with the awkwardness of sinking in mud and tripping over what struggled to be seen. We tried to piece together the narrative on the signs but lost focus until we came close to what I'd though was a tent. There was makeshift deflated boat like form with a large light sitting at the helm. It was like a grave site. This isolated gesture in the middle of a vacant lot in the suburbs was incredibly sad and futile.

We made our way back out to the social outdoor area and huddle and chatted by a fire for a few hours. I managed to find someone to give me a lift home as I hate catching public transport alone at night. As I was driven closer to home myself, the driver and another passenger conferred notes on the exhibition. There was a quiet mention of one of them being a refugee. I was kind of struck by proximity. It was a very compelling exhibition and still today I have been asking people their thoughts on asylum seekers. I haven't found anyone yet that agrees with what Australia is doing.

Pippa Makgill 2013

Artworks below:

Melissa Laing, Newsland, 2013, Rumpus Room, Melbourne, Australia

Melissa Laing and Ashlee Laing, Untitled, 2013 single channel video 8.40 min. Cinematography by Dagmara Gleysztor and Paula Binnie.



Hither and Thither

Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand

Curated by Claudia Arozqueta

Bringing together the work of Auckland artist Melissa Laing and Wellington artist Kerry Ann Lee, this exhibition consists of a series of installations, digital videos, sonic art and publications that explore notions of migration and settlement in New Zealand.

Melissa Laing's untitled 2013 digital video, filmed in Australia and created in collaboration with Melbourne-based artist Ashlee Laing critiques Australia's recent policies on boat asylum seekers that forbids them to settle in Australia and relocates them in Papua New Guinea. It also responds to New Zealand's recent changes to the Immigration Act 2009 and the government's 2012 preparatory exercises simulating a mass arrival with hundreds of people acting as asylum seekers. Laing has also collaborated with Auckland artist Carol Lee-Honson to create a boat carrying ceramic bone fragments, alluding to a history of death and disaster while traversing the seas seeking safety and a final resting place.

Kerry Ann Lee's installation *The Unavailable Memory of Gold Coin Café* (2013) investigates the story of 296 Willis Street, the site of the Gold Coin Café: her parent's takeaway and former family home in the 1980s. Her parents followed the tradition of her ancestors in that upon immigrating to New Zealand in the 1940s they helped set up some of the early Chinese restaurants in Wellington. As the building is currently earthquake-stickered and earmarked for destruction, Lee's installation references her memories and actualities of the space, featuring visual and sonic details to explore the tensions of making a home in the margins. The project is an alternative micro-history of Cantonese migrant legacy and urban settlement in flux in Wellington City over the past 40 years.

"Hither and Thither" is an expression designed to draw attention to things that mutate from one place or situation, implying distance and proximity, 'displacement' and 'placement'. The exhibition invites reflection about historical and current migration perspectives, transcultural circuits, and configurations of space, including the politics and policies of places.

Artworks below:

Melissa Laing and Carol Lee-Honson, *The western shore*, 2013. Oak, gabon marine ply, epoxy, enamel, marine oil, ceramic, polyester and paper. Dimensions variable.

Melissa Laing and Ashlee Laing, *Untitled*, 2013 single channel video 8.40 min. Cinematography by Dagmara Gleysztor and Paula Binnie.

Melissa Laing, *These undesirable immigrants, lunatics, people on these boats. we do not want these people to come - and I make no apology for it*, 2013. Risograph printed by Index Ltd, 12 pages 297 x 210 mm.

