

Inclusive Monuments

Under the crystallising lens of #BlackLivesMatter, the false histories and trauma embedded in our colonial monuments are unfolding. Shadows cast by statues of glorified ‘founding fathers’ stain the ground, unravelling a legacy of oppression, exploitation and violent conquest. Challenges and calls to review and replace these symbols need a plan of action, not only with regard to the promises of Te Tiriti o Waitangi but also under the gender spotlights of #TimesUp and #MeToo.

Women in Aotearoa have protested female exclusion from the public realm since colonisation began – from being denied the legal rights of ‘a person’ in the late nineteenth century, including the right to vote, to objecting to an overarching male symbolism in public space. In the context of a then new 1977 law promising equal rights for women, Māori and other marginalised groups, Te Arikinui Dame Te Atairangikaahu, when opening the Waikato Savings Bank Building in Hamilton, pointed to the bank’s crest – “a Ram’s Head between two Bulls’ Heads,” and said:

May I suggest that it would be prudent –
in view of the Human Rights Commission Act ...
if, on your shield at least one bull
were replaced by a cow.

Quotable New Zealand Women (Reed, 1994, np)

The Māori Queen’s quip made the connection between symbolism and human rights, and how these coexist in the public domain. Public cultural objects are powerful outward expressions of both the status of individuals and their values, and the state of equality in a nation or place.

Elevated notions of power and commercial value attach to masculine symbols, giving reason to a bank's choice of rams and bulls. This translated into a University of Auckland Master of Fine Arts *Painting Reader*, a compilation of recommended texts – 90 percent penned by men, and almost exclusively about man-made art. On the cover, a tongue-in-cheek yet salient script from a John Baldessari painting *Tips for Artists* (1967-68):

Tips For Artists Who Want To Sell

...

Subject Matter is Important: It has been said that paintings with cows and hens in them collect dust ... while the same paintings with bulls and roosters sell.

From paintings to sculptures, the bull reigns supreme – presiding over the pavements of Wall Street and mounted on countless pedestals. In a textbook *mise en scène*, Kristen Visbal's *Fearless Girl* faced off with Arturo Di Modica's *Charging Bull* in Manhattan for one year before being removed to stand alone, amidst complaints the Girl was a commercial ploy and faux feminism, detracting meaning and attention from the bull – itself a symbol of capitalism and full-frontal masculinity.

Across Aotearoa, a parade of colonial male muscle occupies pedestals and parks. Commemorated British-born politicians and leaders include those who orchestrated or led invasions of Māori pā and mana whenua, upheld the oppression of Māori and profited from stolen land. Among these 'founding fathers' are abusers and oppressors of women, and political leaders who repeatedly undermined women's efforts to win the right to vote and used their power to deny New Zealand women the basic human rights.

In the nation's capital alone, there are over 150 pieces of public art. Of the eighteen figurative statues, only two honour individual women – the colonial British monarch Queen Victoria and New Zealand writer Katherine Mansfield. Only one Māori female figure stands in Pōneke Wellington, featured in the sculpture *Hinerangi* by Māori arts leader and artist Darcy Nicholas QSO, at Pukeahu National War Memorial Park. At a televised election debate between women party leaders in 2020, political promises were made to install one more monument in the Capital, honouring an otherwise absent nineteenth century Pākehā suffragist leader, Kate Sheppard.

Two memorials in Pōneke Wellington honour the British brothers William and Edward Gibbon Wakefield. They were imprisoned in England for

abducting a 15-year-old girl from her school and forcing her into marriage for a ransom; a precursor to their exploits leading the New Zealand Company, a government-sanctioned enterprise that amassed and on-sold Māori land. In the Octagon at Ōtepoti Dunedin, a UNESCO City of Literature, a monument to Scottish bard Robbie Burns celebrates a sexual predator outed by poet Liz Lochhead in 2018 as Weinsteinian.

On the forecourt of Parliament, a larger-than-life Premier Richard Seddon, who actively obstructed women's suffrage for years, stands centre stage. A 2020 #DitchDick campaign demands the statue's removal, listing Seddon's "opposition to women's rights, promotion of racist policy against Chinese people, support for widespread confiscations and coercive purchase of Māori land, and attempts to invade and annex the Pacific nations of Fiji, Sāmoa and the Cook Islands, succeeding in the latter." This is streets away from the narrative on the capital city's official website asserting the Seddon statue "importantly injects a degree of humanity into the grounds, reinforcing the idea that Government is made of the people."

As hidden histories emerge, how can we explain and elevate these figures' contributions above their culpability for causing systemic and/or serious harm? If public art has power to engage human hearts, minds and spirits, then today those monuments serve only to reinforce and create further intergenerational harm. Caption rewriting cannot remedy or mitigate the cruel psychology of a glorified oppressor's presence in public space. Such monuments belong in the Oppression Wing of an Aotearoa Museum for Women, with a shared boundary to the larger Museum of Racial Injustice – two containers for relics of a past for which there is no place in the present.

New monuments are needed of ancestors, activists and wāhine toa. The National Council of Women listed eight women worthy of a statue in the capital:

Meri Te Tai Mangakāhia – women's suffrage leader

Kate Sheppard – women's suffrage leader

Dame Whina Cooper – Māori women's activist

Princess Te Puea Herangi – Kīngitanga movement leader

Jean Batten – aviator and first person to fly solo from England to New Zealand

Kate Edger – first woman in New Zealand to gain a university degree

Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan – long-serving MP

Elizabeth McCombs – first woman elected to parliament in New Zealand

There are many more.

A 2020 survey of 500 Māori generated a list of figures who inspired and created, including advocates, navigators, gardeners and tohunga. Tomorrow's monuments might also honour the scientists, health-care workers, volunteers and essential services confronting Covid-19. Future monuments need not be limited to representing history and human aspiration in figure form. As Leonie Hayden (*The Spinoff's* Ātea Editor) says, "What about monuments to generosity? To creation?" The project of democratising public space will allow and celebrate a refreshing diversity of expression and thought.

Attention also needs to be directed toward the commissioning process and the makers of public art. With rare exceptions (typically only when a woman is commissioned to make a statue or memorial for a woman), our public art makers are predominantly European and Pākehā men. The curated spaces of public sculpture exhibitions and sculpture parks reveal the particular function they play in creating the conditions that enable male artists to sustain a practice and to engage in public art.

At the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art Sculpture Park in Denmark, a permanent survey of international modern and contemporary work is listed among 'The World's Best Open-Air Museums.' In 2015, I studied these works in what one commentator described as "all the modern masters of the art of sculpture," and wrote in *Art News New Zealand*: "There's no work by women artists in the Louisiana Sculpture Park, yet." Five years later, there are still no women sculptors in this important collection.

In 2019, at the iconic Storm King, in upstate New York, one of the largest collections of outdoor sculpture in the world, I counted eighty-two artists in the permanent collection including long-term loans. Only fifteen of the artists were women – 18 percent. Beside Ursula von Rydingsvard's *Luba*, in fading light, I staged a virtual *Native Tongue*, the alter ego of an ancient kauri sculpture: literally an Other I. The ephemeral companion momentarily nudged the proportion of women artists up closer to 20 percent. Numbers and pronouns are political. What's measured, counts.

Male occupation of public space is measured also through the pages of academia. Amazon recently delivered a much anticipated new book – *Abstraction Matters: Contemporary Sculptors in Their Own Words* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019). The text expounds on the ideas of

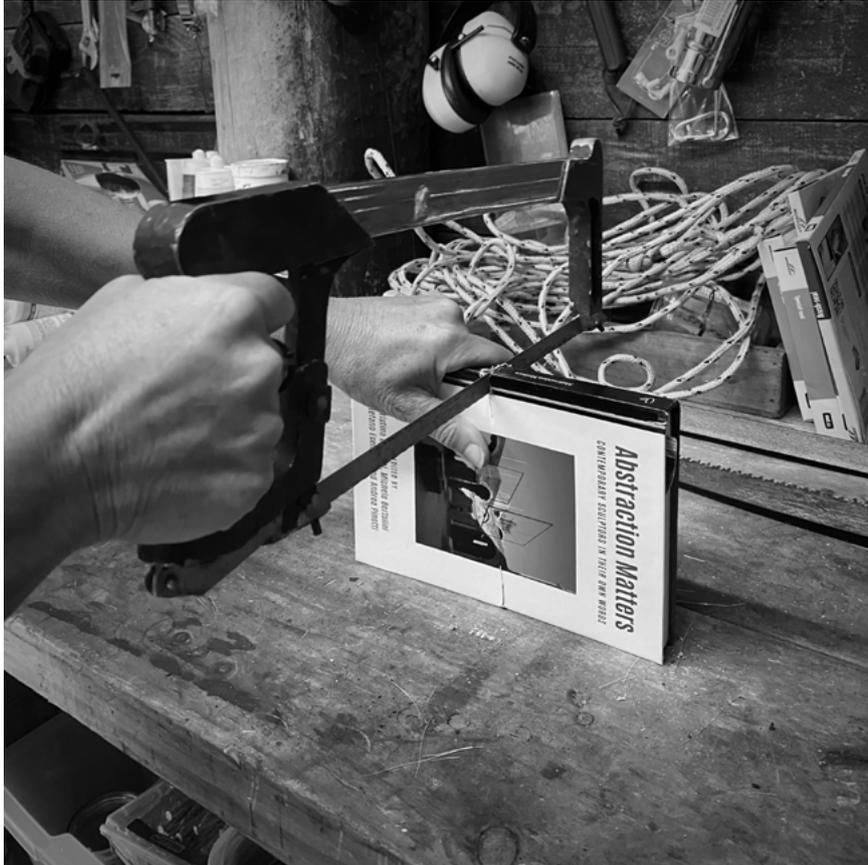


Gill Gatfield, *Storm Queen*, 2019. (*Native Tongue AR*, 2018, with Ursula von Rydingsvard, *Luba*, 2009–10, at Storm King, New York)

fourteen sculptors, including current practitioners, selected for being “not only eminent artists who made their mark in the contemporary sculptural landscape: they are also sharp and insightful theorists, inclined to reflect intensely upon the sense of their own work in particular and upon the nature of abstract sculpture in general.” The sculptors in *Abstraction Matters* are all men. The project demarcates a paradigm in which the makers’ heroic work and texts define the canon. There is literally no room for the Other. As a practitioner of abstraction, I sawed the book in half.

There’s no shortage of women contenders for sculpture books, parks and public collections. Smart public bodies like the UK Arts Council acquired 250 sculptures and installations by more than 150 women, across seventy-five years, including ‘ambitious work’ – the content for a major 2020 touring show in the UK, *Breaking the Mould: Sculpture by Women Since 1945*. In Los Angeles, Hauser Wirth & Schimmel’s exhibition *Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947–2016* presented 100 works by thirty-four international women artists, tracing ways in which women have “changed the course of art by deftly transforming the language of sculpture since the post-war period.”

I think of Anni Albers, who was prevented from studying architecture at the Bauhaus, and directed instead to learn weaving, as “women were unsuited to the rigours of geometry.” Not content with her allocated art form being demoted to second rate, Albers disrupted that canon and built walls of fabric.



Gill Gatfield, *Get Even – Abstraction Matters*, 2020

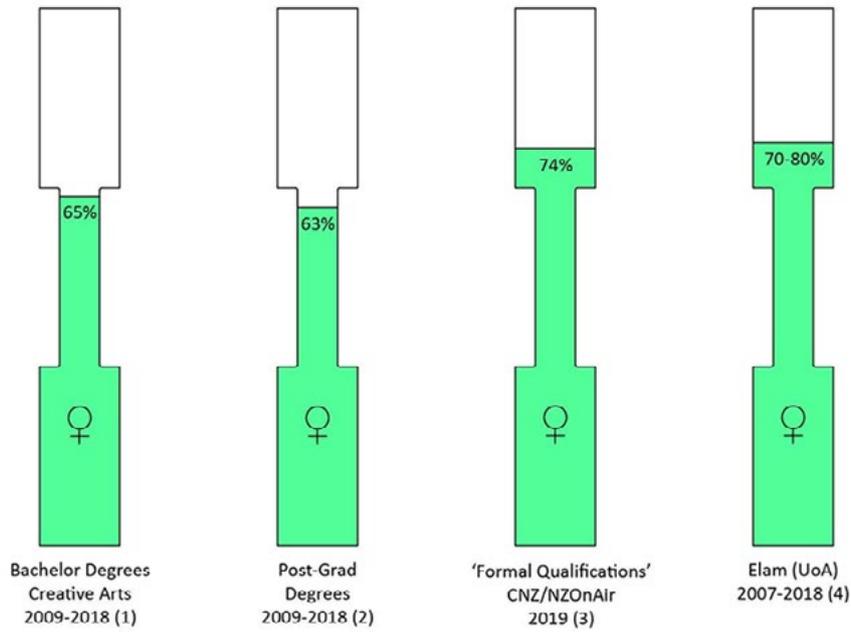
Cities and sculpture exhibitions and parks in Aotearoa bulge with old and new artworks by male artists. Where doors are open, female artists demonstrate innovation, capacity and experience in making outdoor public work, and present challenging works in large numbers in successive national exhibitions such as the *NZ Sculpture OnShore*, a Women’s Refuge fundraiser, in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. Signs of a glass ceiling surface in the commissioning of permanent public work, and in the numbers of female artists shrinking as the prestige of a sculpture exhibition and the rewards on offer increase. At the ratepayer- and patron-funded biannual *Auckland Botanic Gardens Sculpture in the Gardens 2015–2016*, less than one quarter of artists selected were women (24 percent). Similarly in the biannual exhibition *headland Sculpture on the Gulf 2017*, women artists made up just over one quarter of those selected (27.5 percent).

These numbers are reflected in the gender-skewed picture of commissioned and long-term or permanently displayed work. At the privately owned yet sometimes publicly open Gibbs Farm, of twenty-nine major artworks only 10 percent are by women. There are more artists there named Richard and Peter than there are women, giving rise to a potential art Dick Index in the same vein as the John Index, which reflects the dominance of men on company boards. Other contemporary collections conform to the norm, with the proportion of female artists ranging from one third to none at all: Brick Bay Sculpture Park, 33 percent; Connells Bay Sculpture Park, 25 percent; Auckland City Council public art collection, 28 percent; Tai Tapu, Te Waipounamu South Island, 27 percent; Auckland Botanic Gardens, 24 percent; Wellington Sculpture Trust, 18.5 percent; SCAPE Public Art, 15 percent; and at the international gateway Auckland Airport Sculpture Park, 0 percent. As if ruling with an iron fist, a giant sculpture of a male hand recently crossed the country from Ōtautahi Christchurch to Pōneke Wellington, from one public city art institution rooftop to another, a not-so-subtle reminder of who has a firm grip on public space.

A deeply engrained culture of racial and gender bias runs through our historic monuments and in the under-representation of diverse figures and artists' work in public space. Decade upon decade, incrementally, it all adds up. Token gestures and waiting for more time to pass will not correct the imbalance, especially during a pandemic where economic and social impacts fall more heavily on women and ethnic minority groups. None of this points to a conspiracy, but turning a blind eye in the face of knowledge is effectively an act of endorsement. It is time to get even, and assess whether 'even' is the right goal for gender diversity given the higher proportion of women artists who have graduated in the creative sector over the past thirty years. It's time for proactive public art plans that honour the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and deliver gender, racial and intersectional diversity. It's time for an unbiased and inclusive public sphere.

October 2020

Women in NZ Creative Sector - Qualifications



Source: (1,2) Ministry of Education; (3) CNZ/NZOnAir Survey 2019; (4) Fiona Jack, Counterfutures 5, 2018.

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Gender Pay Gap - Creative Work Income

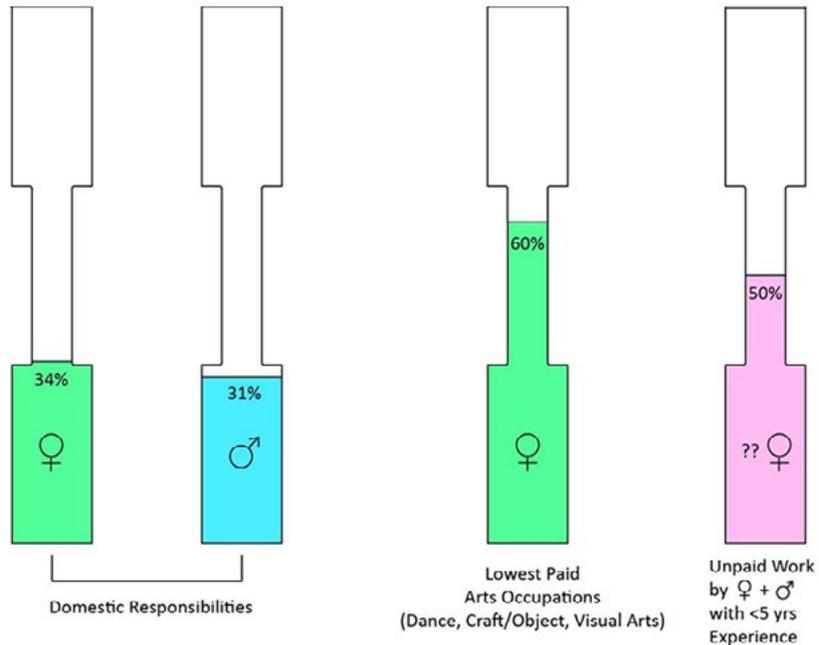


NZ Arts Sector GPG is 45%. NZ National Ave. GPG is 9%.

Source: Colmar Brunton, A Profile of Creative Professionals 2019; CNZ/NZOnAir Survey 2019

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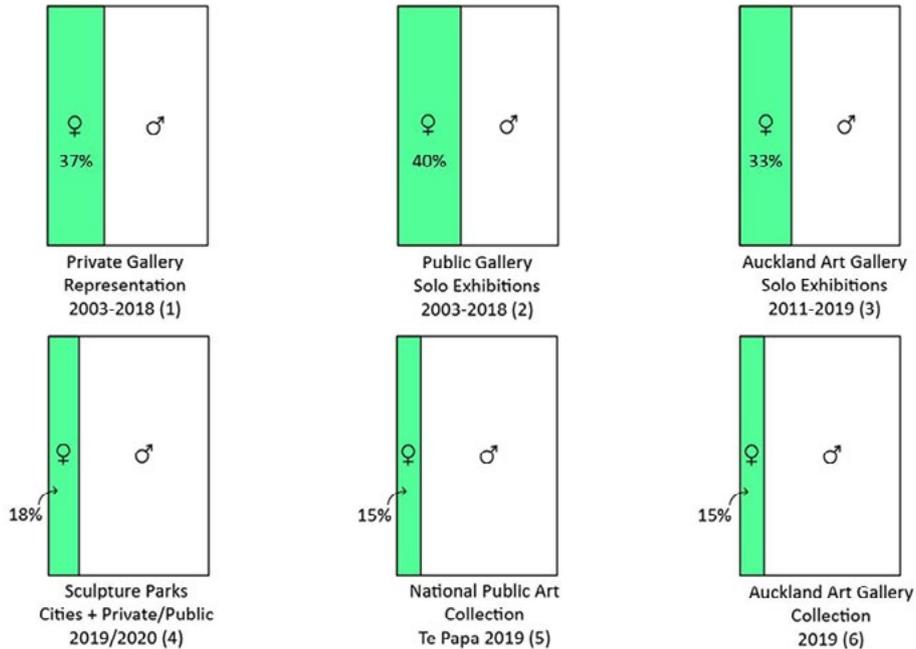
Factors Impacting Progress of Women Creatives



Source: Colmar Brunton, A Profile of Creative Professionals 2019; CNZ/NZOnAir Survey 2019

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Public Exhibitions + Collections - Representation of Women



Source: (1,2) Anna Knox, The Spinoff 2019; (3,6) Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki 2019; (4) Gatfield Studio, NZ sculpture parks & collections 2020; (5) Charlotte Davy in Knox 2019

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