



snartist

Newsletter March 2024

Welcome! I hope the new year is going well for you so far. Can't believe it's March already. For us southern hemisphere folks, it's been full of glorious summer sunshine (such a relief after last year's cyclones), but alas, Autumn is slowly creeping in.

I kicked off 2024 with my very first sculpture trail installation. It was scary and exciting and fun and a relief to finally see it through after many months of prep and unknowns. Thought I'd share a bit of the behind-the-scenes with you.

After that is a short recap of what happened in 2023 if you care to read on...

Introducing *Earth Shrine*

Boon Sculpture Trail Feb 3 - Mar 31, 2024, Hamilton Kirikiroroa



Earth Shrine concept drawing



Earth Shrine is a comment on both the living mastery of nature's systems and the urgency that is needed to find new (or old) solutions to current destructive practices.

The idea was still forming by the time we had to have our concept drawings and blurbs in about a year in advance - eep! I knew roughly that I wanted to achieve a kind of apocalyptic garden that held a 'tension of opposites' (e.g., life/death, renewal/destruction, fragility/strength, peaceful/terrifying). I also wanted it to be interactive somehow, with a quiet darkness that seeps into the collective conscience.

I was never totally sure if I'd achieve this until the day of installation when all the pieces finally came together (speaking of tension!).



I often listen to audio-books while I work. I tell you this because something happened to

me when the books I was 'reading' really collided with the act of wood-working. While learning about forest intelligence and the communal nature of trees with their incredible underground systems of communication through mycorrhizal fungi and above-ground multi-flora and fauna relationships, I was having a direct, hands-on relationship with wood as a medium.



Suddenly the brimming skip-fulls of "waste-wood" I frequented on my scavenges around the community looked like mass atrocities – ancient intelligent beings so carelessly used, abused, and discarded. There was so much life left underneath the dirty, mossy, weathered exteriors – a clean, pale, pine-scented newness emerging with each satisfying pull of the planer. I couldn't believe it was all just going to land-fill.

Highly recommended reading :)



This deepening hyper-sensitivity was extending to other things, like cut flowers in a vase. What used to be a no-brainer – fresh flowers to liven up a space – yaas! suddenly seemed cruel and pointless – whaaa! Such short-lived gain before these incredibly beautiful living masterpieces began to wilt and die in a sad little vessel of putrid water.

I started choosing potted plants and caring for them like pets instead. It was inevitable that this new consciousness would ultimately find expression in an artwork. All of it became the seed that led to *Earth Shrine*.



Alongside nurturing rescued timber back to life, succession plantings were started several months prior to installation for what would hopefully become an explosion of beautiful, wondrous flowers. Soil was divvied out, bulbs submerged, seeds sprinkled and gently pressed into fertile earth. My little back deck was chocka full of buckets and clusters of adolescent plants that have grown under much tender loving care.



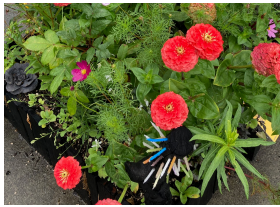
Some clay elements were introduced. First the large vase that 'holds no water', amplifying the greenwashing of industries and capitalist practices that do little to bring about any meaningful change. The vase took the form of a kind of Earth Mother, inspired by the voluptuous figurine known as Venus of Willendorf – one of humankind's earliest sculptures symbolizing the epitome of fertility and abundance. Other clay elements evolved as the four corners of the garden bed called for the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water:

Representing *earth* is a lump of black clay reminding us of powerful volcanic activity or controversial coal; *air* is a bronze-glazed emergency whistle – both a useless relic and reminder of the urgency of change that is necessary right now; *fire* is represented by birthday candles that people are invited to light and make wishes for our shared world; *water* is held in a watering vessel attached to an oil-slicked chain, a former free-flowing river or rain-cloud now a contained, enslaved commodity to be doled out – if there's enough. The public is encouraged to share from their water bottles and help keep *our communal garden* alive and thriving.



The stars of the show are, of course, the flowers. Alive and delicate; emblems of love, grief, apology, celebration and the divine feminine. Beguiling beauty and scents that lure insects, birds, and humans alike. Their colours and greenery juxtapose the blackened elements with an intensified vibrancy, as though gently yelling.





Once installed in this urban environment of concrete and glass, the work took on a new set of unknowns. The well-being of the plants will be evidenced by the health of the life-giving soil ecosystem they stand in – the water afforded them either by chance or by effort. There is hidden bird-seed and a water bath – hopeful attractions for bees, butterflies, and little feathered friends to help build a bit of micro-community in the short time frame of this iteration. What will happen with this work now depends on several elements coming together, like an ecosystem unto itself.

Interactive invitation:

- light a birthday candle and blow it out with a breath that the trees gifted you. Make a wish for the world (share it if you like at #earthshrine or @snartist_ unless you're superstitious about it not coming true;)
- sacrifice some water from your water bottle to help keep the shrine alive.
- sit a moment and consider that plants (and trees and forests) are not just what sits above the surface: there is a myriad of micro-diversity and plant language below the soil, and above – the ecosystems of insects and birds and the millions of magical things going on that go unnoticed by human eyes.
- choose a potted, living plant next time you want some flowers or greenery in your space – something to nurture and grow and be friends with.



I would like to acknowledge the team at Boon Arts Hamilton, especially Claire, Nancy, and Julie for their awesome vision and hard mahi (work). And to Byron and team at Construct Ltd. for their brilliant assistance with installation on behalf of all the other artists (do check them out):

Kereama Taepa, Susannah Salter, Barbara Wheeler, Anya Whitlock, Laurette Madden Morehu & Simi Paris, Chris Moore, Ben Pearce, Paul Darragh, Wanda Gillespie, Kirsten Strom, Sarah Bing, Natalie Guy, Te Rongo Kirkwood, Peata Larkin, Molly Mullen & Becca Wood, Salome Tanuvasa, Stuart Bridson, Julie Moselen, Gaye Jurisich, Dale Cotton & Gina Ferguson, Louise McRae and Antoinette Ratcliffe.

Smaller works are on display at ArtsPost Gallery for the duration of the event: Feb 3rd - Mar 31st.



From left to right: *Everything is Awesome* (ceramic), *Crone* (ceramic), smiling Su, *White Vessel* (ceramic + plasticine), *AloneTogether* (bronzed grass), *Bronze Hug*, Hamilton's Mayor Paula Southgate giving speech

Read on for a recap of...

SNARTIST ACTIVITY 2023



Olive, Adam, and Holly at *The Table*, Aotearoa Art Fair 2023

MARCH

iteration 20: *The Table*

mothermother group show at the Aotearoa Art Fair

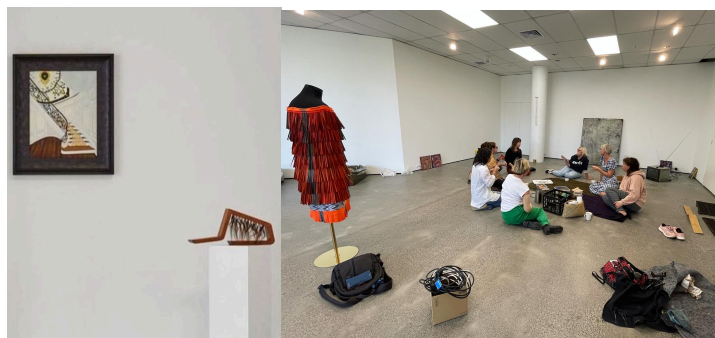
Our plan worked! Over the course of 4 days we had strangers from all walks of life pulling up a chair in our little Aotearoa Art Fair booth at the end of the hall in Auckland's 'Cloud' to sit and chat over a warm cuppa (ok some mugs had rosé in them) and home baking.

In an often contentious arty environment, it felt good to bring some grassroots human connection to the event. My bronze hug sat on the table and I so enjoyed watching people idly fondle the irresistibly cool, weighty smoothness as they chatted.

Particularly the double-sided belly button ;)

Photo above shows the extra bonus of having my beloved brother and his partner visiting Aotearoa at the same time (with daughter Olive - the huggee in this work).

[See more info and images about this exhibition on my website](#)



The 'muths' pausing for shared kai at *Suburbia* install, Northart Gallery 2023

APRIL/MAY

iteration 22: *Suburbia*

mothermother group show at Northart Gallery, Auckland

Another fulfilling experience with the muths. We were 26 exhibitors all up with no real curatorial plan prior to the day of install. This can either mean chaos or complete magic! In this case a bit of both. After much figuring and jiggering, the artworks started speaking to each other and interesting little relationships formed on their own. Hats off to these talented women. There's

something about getting shit done wahine-style - it was a process filled with hard mahi (work), kind honesty, mutual support, helpful assistance, and shared kai (food). #whorunstheworld 🤗

[VIEW TIME-LAPSE VIDEO TOUR](#)

[See more info and images about this exhibition on my website](#)



Su Nelson with *Hestia II* at WSA Small Sculpture Award Show 2023

JUNE

**Waikato Small Sculpture Awards
finalists exhibition at blue Gallery, Hamilton Kirikiroroa**

Was totally thrilled to be included in the WSA small sculpture award show last June. This particular work titled *Hestia II* is representative of the direction things have taken lately towards the 'unholy trinity' of hair, clay, and rescued wood. Not finished with this line of enquiry yet...watch this space.

[See more info and images about this exhibition on my website](#)



Team Tanks - Gina, Colleen, Jane, and Nicola

JULY - OCTOBER

It was tools down in the studio during a 4-month contract working f/t at Tanker Creative while their lovely Gina was on an extended holiday. Tanker is a small-but-mighty team of kickass women at the top of their game in graphic design, website design, digital marketing, and mentoring Creatives in professional development. It's a warm, colourful, fun place to work and I was delighted to be asked to stay on permanently at the end of my contract. Yep, you're looking at the new Manager of Studio & Accounts with renegotiated p/t hours to allow for art practice to continue #winwin!

SUE

And lastly... yes, you may have noticed this ditched the lol

And lastly - yes, you may have noticed I've ditched the e .

Huge life step, I know (jokes), but somehow it feels like a refreshing new Su - just a bit less ordinary and I like that when spelled backwards, becomes 'us'!

Sincere thanks for your continued interest in my work and all the supportive energy that comes from sharing - I hope to be in touch with more studio insights soon.

Kia kaha, sending you love and strength in strange times,
xo Su

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