

# Letter from one of the curators

Talei Yates

It has been one of the greatest highlights of my year having the opportunity to help curate this exhibition along with the curatorial team Felix Pryor, Avigail Allan, Hazel Ellis and Kate Cox. With that said, we are in debt to the hard work that our fellow students have contributed in order to make this show. As a tribute to our understanding of our own practice you can expect that the works within the show do not thoroughly present a strong theme, but it is notable that what it does contribute is a great deal of consideration of our future endeavours as artists.

I think it is important to recognize that it is the end of our time at Elam School of Fine Arts and that this is our first function as a cohort outside the university. I will aim to discuss some of the site-specific works in the exhibition, as well as works that speak about the significance of this time as our last year and of our future beyond Elam. In addition, I will acknowledge how certain works allow for a newly-formed community through their invitation to participate.

A key work which highlights the idea that it is our last year as a cohort can be seen on the top floor of the exhibition. Kirsty McNeil's *Your space, or mine* (2016) involves 95 miniature cardboard boxes appropriating spaces within themselves: the number of boxes each representing the number of students in our year. The work asks us to consider the spaces we have shared over the past four years together and our future art spaces. Originally Kirsty and I had decided that the work would be best in a grid format on the floor, however, it seemed more fitting to place them on top of the tables that we make work on at Elam. Underneath these tables McNeil presents some rogue boxes to address the concern that some of us may no longer continue a studio practice after Elam. This can make us consider how we may think about our lives after art school, which seems fitting for a show such as this one.

In considering spaces and how we may be accustomed operating within the institution, I found it particularly interesting when artists chose to work site-specifically for this exhibition. When walking upstairs, viewers are immediately met by an airy waterfall of pink fabric draped over two rafters, a collaborative work called *I'm leaving tomorrow, but I could leave today* (2016) by Mia Morris and Felixe Laing. Not only does the work address the viewer in its scale and response to the site, but it also attempts to make a comment on collaboration. In considering how collaboration is usually difficult because of the marking schedule at Elam, they saw the opportunity of this exhibition as a way of working together to create something ambitious. Morris and Laing have written on the fabric extracts of conversations about the title of the exhibition: giving the viewer a moment to slow down, read, and reflect perhaps on their own lives. Choosing oblique phrases such as, "holding on, letting go, letting on, holding go", allows for any viewer to apply these terms to their own experiences. However, in this context we may consider how we are letting go and holding onto our experiences at Elam.

Another work which addresses site-specificity is Jerome Van Rijn's work *Yu- Ki-eh (the floating world)* (2016). In negotiation with myself and the organisers, Van Rijn was given an area of the space by the stairwell where he has illustrated his ambiguous figures on the walls, surrounded by his painted canvases. Translating street culture and character-based imagery, Van Rijn draws parallels between his everyday life and

the culture easily recognised outside the walls of the exhibition on the busy Symonds Street; both bridging and acknowledging the divide between street art and fine art.

Another work to address the external space of the exhibition is Tommo Jiang's *Mirror, Mirror* (2016), employing a portrait TV screen, visible from the street behind a window panel of the exhibition space. Mimicking the advertising signs and screens that populate Auckland's bus stops, Jiang's work aims to subvert the ubiquity of consumer-focused screens in everyday life. Played on a loop of high contrasting colours and text, the enticing features adopted speak to the act of seduction commonly seen in advertising. However, Jiang's work becomes almost an advertising piece in its own right by reaching out to the passing viewers and calling attention to the site and its current occupation. *Mirror, Mirror* suggests that we should be aware of living in a world of fleeting pleasure: that rather than being accustomed to these advertising methods, we should consider living our lives in protest of these accepted hierarchies.

A notable work which plays on the exhibition's architecture is Java Bentley's *Immigrating Spaces* (2016). Travelling downstairs, spectators of the show are confronted by a liminal hallway of luminous aluminium foil. We immediately get the sense that we are in a construction site as the foil reminds us of an unfinished building. The work acts as a transformative quilt for the mundane hallway, closing around the viewer and drawing attention to the space itself. Acting as a device to place bodies in a space and acknowledge the hallway, Bentley gives attention to an area that wouldn't typically be addressed. With further observation, *Immigrating Spaces* can be thought of as a commentary on the exhibition site itself: how Black Note as a previous bar, and not your-general-white-wall-gallery, is not a traditional site for art students to occupy and address.

A sense of community seems highly important for a lot of the works within the show, particularly with *On the moment of change, there is always a cup of tea* (2016), comprised of many individually unique, ceramic cups by the collective of artists, Many Hands. As a whole the cups serve not only as artworks but as functional objects for events and discussion groups throughout the show. The beauty of this work is in its sense of invitation, an offering to the viewer, allowing a sense of extended community for anyone who enters the exhibition.

However, what happens when the viewer is asked to give something? Elisa Barczak's *Trading Table* (2016) acknowledges a sense of community both through the exchange of objects and through its reliance on the viewer to participate in order for the artwork to remain continuous. Barczak will begin the trading table with artworks and other objects from the people involved in the exhibition. My own interest lies in Barczak's aim for the trading table to operate like an honesty box where, with no organiser watching the table, she places trust in the community, leaving the trading to happen by chance. To document the work, Barczak intends to take a daily photograph to record the changes in the trading table, and these photographs will function both as an archive and a work on its own. The *Trading Table* raises such questions as: How do we negotiate the value of an item in exchange for another? How do we attribute value? Are these the kind of questions that we will soon be asking ourselves post-Elam, if we are willing to compromise our principles in order to make saleable art? What do I want? Where do I stand? Are these the very questions many of us as artists will continue to ask ourselves throughout our lives?