

All artworks by Kate Newby
from *YES TOMORROW*, Adam
Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi, 2021

Always humming, 2021, glass,
and *What Kind of Day Has it
Been*, 2021 (detail), screed,
pigment, glass, silver, bronze.
Photo: Ted Whitaker

Opposite: *SHE'S TALKING
TO THE WALL*, 2012–21 (detail),
assorted clay, glaze, glass, thread,
wire. Photo: Ted Whitaker





Shaper

Lachlan Taylor assesses an exhibition infused with context and rich in collaboration.

Exhibition-making is always a collaborative enterprise, we just try really hard to pretend it isn't. With unnaturally slick presentation and small tricks of concealment, institutions hide most of the laboured marks and indents that go into producing a show. We use misnomers like 'solo exhibition' to enforce the illusion that what we're seeing is the final stage in a linear process of creative production that begins and ends in the body of a single person. Even the spaces themselves, our congenial white cubes, are burnished with layers of cultural history to appear as nonplaces – empty cups to be filled and emptied again.

The truth, of course, is that any exhibition is the consequence of an enormous network of people, objects, places and histories. That in the final product these chains of creation and production are made to resemble the tree and not the roots is ultimately to the detriment of good art and good exhibitions. This dynamic, and the problems it poses, are at the centre of Kate Newby's exhibition practice. The Floresville, Texas-based artist offers a direct challenge to orthodoxy by bringing collaborative labour to the forefront of her processes and presentation, and

through a commitment to fundamentally altering the meaning and felt-sensation of exhibition spaces.

YES TOMORROW is Kate Newby's largest and most ambitious project in Aotearoa to date. Beginning in the Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi, the exhibition spills out of the gallery itself, onto the Kelburn campus of Victoria University and into a nearby park. The seven individual elements or interventions that comprise the show represent a kind of art and exhibition-making that forefronts values of community, collaboration, openness, patience and labour. The exhibition rejects the seamless individualism that shadows much contemporary art in favour of the mess and marks of collaborative work and creation.

The exhibition follows a string of recent projects for Newby with a shared framework. Invested and engrained in specific sites, Newby works with a network of local makers to create works that variously operate within, intervene in and transform a given exhibition space. It's an approach that encourages a focus on the body in space, the constant renegotiation of your own presence within a complete environment rather than contemplation on individual objects.



SHE'S TALKING TO THE WALL (2012–21) is a composite of seven ceramic wind chimes produced over a decade. The finger-like forms, a familiar aspect of Newby's practice, are strung from cables that extend along the full length of the Adam, bowing across the upper gallery like absurd clotheslines that hold each set in place. As a support structure the cabling is impractical, if not farcical, but it's not there to be pragmatic. The structure pulls the building in towards itself and announces from the first that the points of contact and experience that walk you through the exhibition are not being dictated to by the usual supports and spaces of the building.

There's a cliché that arts writers use when describing exhibitions at the Adam Art Gallery – one I've definitely turned to. The trick is to establish a conflict between the artist tasked with presenting their practice in the space and the building's unique or idiosyncratic architecture. It sets up a dialectic: artist on one side, gallery on the other, and the exhibition emerging as the synthesis of the two. *YES TOMORROW* reveals how conditional thinking through this binary really is. This exhibition controls, occupies and transforms the space with an absolute confidence. There is a strength, will, and muscularity to Newby's practice that rarely enters discussions of her work, but can't be escaped in this context. Yes, her interventions open up a space, but a wrench is a better metaphor than a blooming flower.

Mounted directly behind the wind chimes is one of the three glass panes that make up *Always humming* (2021). Interventions into the skin of the building itself, each of the three panes is an opaque and perforated

replacement for one of the Adam's original windows. These panels were individually cast by glass artist Claudia Borella in Whanganui. One, facing out onto the university courtyard, is mounted high on the building with two large holes; another is placed low, pocked and perforated like glass coral. The works puncture the sense of grounded stability that the gallery's gridded steel, concrete and glass usually suggests. Instead, the exterior becomes something membranous, open and breathy. The pane behind *SHE'S TALKING TO THE WALL* in the right conditions allows wind to enter into the space, awakening the chimes to a gentle clatter as the building itself breathes.

How funny you are today, New York (2010–21) occupies the Adam's Kirk Gallery. Old and new bodies of work are displayed on a raised timber platform that restricts movement in an already small space to a thin pathway. The presentation brings with it a museological feel that seems at odds with the rest of the show. Arranged in tight clusters, some of the works displayed with paper labels, it's a closed and prescribed moment in an otherwise open and expansive exhibition. There is something to be said for a tonal shift that prevents us from getting too comfortable, too convinced by the romantic lightness of the rest of the show. Whether that was the intention or not, it comes at the expense of the works in the room – huddled, clustered, stifled and atonal.

The bottom floor of the gallery is entirely covered by a cement-like blue screed. Or rather, the bottom floor of the gallery has become a blue screed. It stretches from the stairs to the end of the gallery space and is marked at every pace by the indents and gouges of fingers and hands.

Left: *Always humming*, 2021, glass. Photo: Ted Whitaker

Below right: *You got to write a song and I got to be in it*, 2021, terracotta tiles. Photo: Ted Whitaker

Far below: Rob Duncan Megan Daniel Margaret Lynn Samuel Deb Nico Marilyn Sarah Henry Mieko Kate Ruth Mike Briana Justine Grace Romesh Josefine Madison Nerissa David Nina Gabrielle Dayle Isabelle Ana Lilith Christian Ruby Sophie Millie Michaela Loretta Laura Christina Alison Olly Miriam Fred Lise Hazel Simon Mia Anita Caroline Anna Prak Nadya Alba Xander Flavia Emma Stef Areez Bella Rachel Kirsty Kate Nicola Emerita Tim Megan Ruby Fina Felixe Ella Eva Ben Julian Bena Huhana Max Lily Tina Rose Bill and Teresa, 2021, assorted clay, glaze, mortar. Photo: Ted Whitaker

The marks are an incredibly human relief on an unnatural surface that manages to seem at once dense and buoyant. There are sweeps, pulls, gutters and claws, met by occasional artificial elements like an aluminium can tab. Shaky horizontal lines punctuate each stretch of the screed. Newby evolved the surface with her marks after the screed was poured, in sections, and up close the effect is like a messy contemporary equivalent of the Renaissance giornata – the area of wet fresco that could be applied and painted in a single day. Viewed from above, the horizontal lines become waves rolling across the coarse blue floor, a fitting vision for its oceanic complexion.

Like so many of the works in *YES TOMORROW*, the pleasure of being with the floor isn't so much in contemplation of materials or forms, but in the bodily experience of standing on it and walking through it. It is the most radical of Newby's alterations to the Adam, and the one that most enthusiastically reinforces the change the gallery has undergone as a whole. Instead of a compromise between artist and architecture, *YES TOMORROW* is what happens when a gallery is fully transformed by a project and animated into a space that offers a different kind of experience.

One of Newby's gestures outside the gallery is a grid of terracotta tiles full of sweeping marks and divots similar to those of the screed floor. This work, *You got to write a song and I got to be in it* (2021), lies in a courtyard next door to the gallery and can be seen from within. The second is much harder to find – placed in Terrace Tunnel Park, a small pocket of green space above the motorway that many Wellingtonians may never have seen nor heard of. The work is a row of clay tiles embedded into a ditch in the sloped park, resembling a tessellated water drain. Each of the tiles was shaped across the thigh of a volunteer, the final installation a product of their collective patience. The names of each shaper have been enshrined as the title of the work. The tiles were fired at potter Duncan Shearer's kiln in Paeroa before being fixed in this strange, out-of-the-way pocket of turf. Separated from the main body of the exhibition, the work quietly exemplifies its same values: collaboration, patience, an opening up of space. It's a fitting place to end time spent with *YES TOMORROW* – out in the open, standing with the product of collaborative work frozen in an expansive stillness, while cars gently rumble beneath your feet.

Kate Newby's *YES TOMORROW* is at the Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi, Wellington, until 30 May.

