

Small Town Revelations

A dramatised, photographic retelling of regionalised histories, legends, myths and past characters within small town Aotearoa New Zealand.

Research Question:

Can collaboratively staged photographic tableaux visually express a local identity, with particular reference to the location, history and legend of small towns and, if so, how might the inhabitants assist in defining a sense of place through this collaboration?

- David Fergus Austin -

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Name of candidate: **David Fergus Austin**



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is submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of
Master of Design by Project (Photography & Media Arts)

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Small Town Revelations - A dramatised, photographic retelling of regionalised histories, legends, myths and past characters within small town Aotearoa New Zealand.

Department of Design

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Abstract

This Masters of Design by Project is a heuristic practice-based research undertaking that investigates perceptions of local identity and sense of place for residents of small town Aotearoa New Zealand. Through establishment of an interactive collaborative methodology this project seeks to derive potentially viable illustrative subject matter based upon folklore relevant to the local residents of small towns and remote communities.

This exegesis documents an investigation that encompasses those within society who choose to attach themselves to distinctive places within the landscape and how they might identify themselves within it. Both this document and the project's photographic works evidence a journey of discovery; a journey that looked to uncover small town history, myth, and legend, the known and little known, the past and bygone, the people, lifestyles and place. These are places where the residents feel very much of, in contrast to being merely from.

Appropriately then it was the residents of small towns who became storytellers, revealing folklore that informed the narratives underpinning each of the works which are intended to portray a sequence of events that reflects a local story. Significant challenges lay in reinterpreting verbally recollected stories into something visually tangible and engaging. As artistically motivated reinterpretations of folklore the works expose an inherent acuity for stereotype, sentimentalism and nostalgia. However, instead of detracting or distracting from the storyline these cognitive characteristics potentially become contributory facets that add new layers to the narrative.

Along this journey I became many things more than simply an empathetic photographer. My function progressively developed from that of outside observer to include the roles of listener, facilitator, negotiator, translator, activist, director, digital technician and, ultimately, that of a visual story re-teller.

Statement of Intent

This Masters of Design by Project is submitted as a two-part presentation. Firstly as an exhibition of the completed and finished photographic art works which are presented as large-scale mounted prints, on display within Gallery 5 of NorthArt, located on the North Shore in Auckland; and secondly this written document, a completed exegesis.

MLA referencing

This exegesis is completed using MLA (Modern Language Association) standard for in-text citation and bibliographic reference as set out through the online Unitec Library website MLA Referencing guide and the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers: Seventh Edition*.

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Dedicated to my wife, Virginia, for her immeasurable support and patience.

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Introduction

“All places exist somewhere between the inside and outside views of them, the ways in which they compare to, and contrast with, other places”. (Lippard 33)

The basic truth of Lippard’s statement above could well form a subtext for the investigation of this project. This Masters of Design by Project is a practice-based research undertaking born out of a desire to explore what inspires, motivates and stimulates notions of local identity for the people living in small towns and remote communities of Aotearoa New Zealand.

So, what makes up a small town? Who lives there and why do they choose to? What defines someone as local? How would local people identify themselves as being of a particular place, and not of any other? How might they express their connections to the town? Are these attachments somehow

reinforced through perceptions of a local identity? Can local identity itself be characterised and reinterpreted as something visually tangible, appropriate and engaging, not only for outsiders, but for the very people to which it refers? These are all fundamental questions that underpin the inquiry of this project, *Small Town Revelations*.

Motivation for this undertaking lay within a desire to uncover the ways in which perceptions of local identity and sense of place uniquely connect and bind local people to the place in which they live. This project provided a unique opportunity to investigate beyond the often idealistic romanticised portrayals of small town lifestyles perpetuated through outside media channels and discover how local people themselves would reveal their paradigm of place and identity.

The scope of this investigation developed initially as an ethnographic-style exploration through seeking to explore a particular section of our society. As the investigation progressed it evolved to reflect on ideological parallels that exist for those who claim local identity and the personally emotive challenges facing one who struggles to sense it. The revelations local people made were dissected and conceptually reinterpreted in order to construct a set of allegorical illustrative tableaux. Each of the works is an unavoidable reinterpretation of a narrative that references a past event; they are subjective renderings that abstractly echo the characteristics of embellishment and stereotype that play such an important role in the story telling process.

0.1 Project Structure

This exegesis is submitted as evidence of a strategic holistic methodology employed for this practice-based research undertaking. It demonstrates a structured process comprising both this written document and the accompanying constructed works. Literature analysis, research evaluation, theoretical assessment and self-critique have been used to position a cognitive understanding of the following key factors:

- finding local identity for and with small town and rural communities
- the unearthing of folklore; revelations of local histories, myths, legend
- developing a practical methodology for community-based artistic collaboration, third party participation and contribution as practices for story telling
- translating select revelations through allegoric tableaux.

Through this document I will address these elements in greater detail and present critical analysis and reflective observation to synthesise and conclude the project. Research material, relevant literature and other published findings are discussed as a framework for the understanding of local identity and sense of place and the visual conventions of the historical narrative tableau.

Through utilising a methodology aimed at engaging the residents of small towns in a process of collaborative and contributory participation, and drawing on previously developed, research-based practice techniques utilised by other practitioners, I sought to work with local residents to explore how they might express the notion of a local identity and articulate the reasons why they live in small towns through personal recollections.

0.2 This is an Art-focused Project

In introducing this investigation, I am also compelled to define what it is not. This project is not intended as a formal socio-scientific investigation of small towns and their residents. As such, the project's outcomes are not intended to contribute further to existing sociological or psychological records. Having made this point it is acknowledged that the research encompassed relevant aspects of the social sciences, including anthropology, history, politics, economics, human geography, cross-cultural, environmental and psychology, in order to appropriately investigate and critically reflect upon ethnography and issues that influence this sector of our society. Nor should this project be considered as a photographic documentary, certainly not in the true sense of documentary. However, it is also recognised that aspects of the project's in-the-field exploration advanced themselves in a manner similar to that of a documentary tradition.

0.3 Scope of Exploration

In conceiving this project, the exploration initially included travelling the length and breadth of the country to find the ‘right towns’. The intention was to encompass places I had not visited before. The plan began with a comprehensive itinerary to canvass far-flung populated New Zealand settlements, including such places as the Chatham Islands, Stewart Island, the isolated towns on the West Coast of the South Island, the far reaches of the remote East Cape, and other similar out-of-the-way settlements.

I subsequently acknowledged this initial scope of exploration was pointedly too lofty a goal within the time frame set out for completing the investigation in its ambitious entirety. I explored ways in which to make the project more manageable, and commenced preliminary outings to explore the satellite townships of greater Auckland, established towns such as

Pukekohe, Orewa, Helensville, and Oneroa on Waiheke Island. All are today located within the Auckland Super City borders, yet each is remote enough to maintain a distinctively individual small town community lifestyle. It was on Waiheke Island that I made the first serious forays into developing a creatively focused collaboration with locals.

The criteria for collaboration within the project was still to be resolved and I was discovering that the trial runs at maintaining the island residents’ interest and involvement were not as successful as I had hoped. The local people initially propositioned showed enthusiasm and appeared happy to meet to discuss, listen and find what the project was about. However, I experienced difficulty with subsequent attendance when arranging follow-up meetings. The project was in its very early stages and the aims and objectives embryonic. In hindsight, the intentions of the outcomes of the project, perhaps also my explanations of what I was intending to

achieve, presumably appeared somewhat unresolved to my audience. I recognised that I was also employing too much of a ‘scatter gun’ approach. The choices of town and which residents to approach were perhaps too random and too generalised. Understanding this was a timely reality check. I realised I had to make more specific and pragmatic choices. I chose to focus on the people and towns of the Kaipara Region.

The decision to focus solely on the Kaipara was the result of a positive and sustained response by local residents of Helensville, the largest town in the southern Kaipara. This decision ensured that there would be little need to change or amend my project’s intentions, aims and objectives. Being accessible within a relatively short one to two hours drive from my home in Auckland, the decision to concentrate the investigation on the Kaipara Region also helped resolve somewhat potential problems of travel and time. I would

have more time to undertake the exploration and to develop relationships with local residents and be less about concerned distance.

In addition to Helensville, the exploration now looked to include the Kaipara settlements of South Head, Shelly Beach, Waitoki, Wainui, Woodhill, Kaukapakapa, north past inland Glorit to Port Albert (which, once destined to have a population greater than Auckland, now quietly sits in the far reaches of the eastern river deltas that feed the harbour), from Maungatoroto north again to follow the course of the main north Kaipara Harbour tributary, the mighty Wairoa River to Ruawai, Dargaville, as far north as Bayleys Beach and on again down south along the North Head peninsula to the tiny settlement of Pouto Point (situated on the mouth of the Kaipara Harbour). All of these towns are established places with lengthy and fascinating local histories.

0.4 Starting out

Adopting an empathetic understanding of lifestyle was critical to maintaining the contact established with local residents. A routine of regular visits was developed, often two to three times a week, calling in on various towns to speak with local people and on other occasions to scope out new places. I met with those attending the likes of visitor information centres, local museums, art galleries, public libraries, and also business operations such as petrol stations, cafes and corner dairy stores. The aim was to seek out those who were considered knowledgeable and had a well-grounded awareness of local history and folklore, and were willing to share it, and those with an ability for oral storytelling.

This was also a time for photographic documentation. Many thousands of photographs documenting local people, places and events have been captured through the duration of this

project. Initially, I felt self-conscious walking around these places photographing, and sensed people viewed me with a certain degree of suspicion. In *On Photography* Susan Sontag argues the camera is like “a predatory weapon” and that to “photograph people is to violate them” (Sontag 14). In planning the exploration these notions played on my consciousness. It may be true, as Sontag maintains, that “there is something predatory in the act of taking a picture”, it was something that loomed as a warning for me (14).

I had begun to realise I was about to start imposing myself on a number of people as I had never before. I realised something tangible was needed to break down the barriers more efficiently, something that would put locals at relative ease as we first met. I recalled how the simple act of handing over a business card as a way to introduce myself, made me feel more comfortable, and importantly, confident when meeting people for the first time. It is an accepted part of business

culture. Bearing these in mind, I designed and had produced a unique introductory card that specifically references the project. Not only has this card worked brilliantly to allay any reservations of those I've met through the course of the project, it has also provided me with a greater confidence when making those introductions.

To gain genuine and authentic levels of involvement, it was important to bring people on board the project as willing collaborators. The locals were the essential contributors of the narratives upon which my works are based. Their input was fundamental in terms of the methodology conceived for this project: forming a series of story-telling tableaux; tableaux I hoped would not only satisfy the objectives set out for my project, but would also potentially reinforce the attachment of the locals to their small town, their community, their place. The place which they call home.

In order to locate reliably knowledgeable sources from within each town and community that would similarly share their stories, demanded a considered, careful and respectful approach. I had to ensure my own story and intentions were in turn ready to be clearly explained and understood.



*Fig. 1: Helensville Returned Services ANZAC Day Parade, 25th April 2012.
(image by the author)*



Fig. 2: Early formative work: Helensville & Districts Historical Society re-enactors pose for a period staged group image in the replica parlour of Hedley House, Helensville Pioneer Village, Helensville, 28th March 2012 (image by the author)

Chapter 1: Small Towns

1.1 Chapter Introduction

This first chapter establishes a rationale for this project and discusses the motivations for this undertaking. It is intended to theoretically reflect upon subjective issues that surround local identity and discuss more specifically how the project relates to the people inhabiting country towns. The aim here is to articulate discourse that expresses an empathy and understanding of the significance for this sector of our society. This chapter also offers a definitive account of the people and places encapsulated through the exploration.

1.2 A Personal Rationale

Imagine for a moment, moving far away from your place of birth, the place where you grew up, the place where you and your family had its roots, the place where your extended family and relatives lived nearby, the place where you developed friendships and relationships, the place where you went to school and learned about life. Imagine moving away forever from the place you identified with as being your home town. Imagine all those things that made you as a person being left behind to live a new life on the other side of the world and never getting the chance to go back.

Imagine also that place after you left being subsequently torn apart by civil war, inter-tribal conflict, repressive media controls, careless land reform policies, chronic food shortages, rampant HIV and AIDS infection rates, economic

breakdown through hyperinflation and finally complete monetary collapse where a foreign currency is the only legal tender, and the worst excesses of politically motivated violence, corruption and social injustice are reportedly routine (Godwin 153-162). Also try to imagine almost every street, suburb, town, cities and even the country itself having names changed so that maps, street directories or encyclopedias become redundant. Imagine the place in which you were born and raised ceasing to exist in everything but memory itself. Imagine your birthplace changing so profoundly that you could no longer identify with it at all.

I came from just such a place to live in New Zealand in my early teenage years. I recall for years how I proudly clung to what was my sense of place, where I came from, and how it defined me. I was of course holding on to something that had become false, just a memory.

The place of my formative years was changing in many ways, forever, the reality of a new world order and political expediency. Over time the feelings of loss have diminished. Yet notions of sense of place and local identity appear as something that other people have. The concept of being of a place is what others appear to experience.

I have become adept at recognising the signifiers, the references, the sense of belonging local people experience and acknowledge sometimes having to suppress feelings of envy. I have become fascinated by the concept of what is local identity. I am intrigued by how people of a distinctive community often believe they are as much a part of the place they come from, as the place is itself. Lippard proposes, “inherent in the local is the concept of a place – a portion of land, town, cityscape seen from the inside” (Lippard 7). I wanted to explore how those who have this view that Lippard identifies, might choose to express it.

Although the residents of small towns are few, they appear to hold a more outwardly visible notion of what is their local identity. Certainly, it appears more overt when compared with what one finds in the city.

I acknowledge this is a speculative view and therefore may be seen as a generalisation. I am making a point and posing a question for myself, and intend to find answers. The situation appears different in cities or larger towns, where the demands and distractions of a faster pace of life are such that claiming one's local identity does not appear to be much of a priority for many. If there is ambivalence toward issues of local identity by those living in large population centres, it is because there are many other more pressing issues for them to be concerned about. City neighbourhoods have “a less unified flavour than in small towns”, which results in residents being more ephemeral as to where they choose to live (210).

Perhaps it is that residents of small towns are more involved and vocal about their community and its issues because this is what being a part of a small town entails. Perhaps it is that within these small towns people take on more civic, community and social roles, as they are needed to participate in the running of the place.



*Fig. 3: Low tide, Shelly Beach, Kaipara, 19th December 2011
(image by the author)*

Accordingly, from an outside view they appear more accessible. It is with these residents of small towns that I chose to explore creatively artistic opportunities that would highlight what the concept of local identity meant for them and if the illustration of local histories myths and legends might help reaffirm their views of local identity.

1.3 The Local: cornerstone of the small town

From an outside view, the residents of small towns appear extraordinary. Their lives seem more attached to the place they come from, sometimes as a result of being born and raised there or due to the fact they lived there for considerable period of time. Lippard perceives the pride small town people experience in their “stability and insularity” (157). For them their town remains apart and remote from all other places, separated not only by distance but also by difference

of identity. The town’s continued survival is maintained and perpetuated by its own residents, those who will always identify themselves as being *of the place*. These residents, the locals, appear as much part of it as it is a part of them.

To belong is a fundamental facet of human nature. These people who make up the community are throughout their lives ingrained with that sense of place, that sense of belonging. These same places may appear from an outside view somewhat unremarkable and little different from any other small town yet those that call this place home appear to instinctively appreciate their unique identity is always unlike any other place. One observation resulting from the exploration undertaken for this project is that people who are born and raised in small towns appear to hold a deeply felt connection to the place. Residents often appear to have an innate sense of inner pride and attachment, something that affirms just who they are.

Small towns have persisted in their size and remoteness because they were usually founded, settled and located away from main transportation routes that connect to major population centres. According to Paul L Knox, new towns were generally established as “bases closer to the sources of raw materials, or as the market collection point for principal commodities, resources and production and thus contributors towards other much larger economies in the form of distanced cities and regional centres” (12). Demographically small towns have for decades seemed largely stagnant when compared with the economic and population growth so obviously seen in urban and city populations (12).

I find it intriguing, as Knox contends, that small towns have generally been marginalised, to a certain extent ignored, by both central and local government when compared with larger population centres and this often contributes towards their decline, thus ensuring small towns remain much the

size they are. (12). Populations have usually remained low as more people leave than arrive to live in these places, and this is felt most where better educated, younger residents move on, leaving behind a place where their skills and continued commitment to the town are often sorely missed (12).

It is noteworthy, however, that the challenges faced by small towns and their resident populations appear to make attachment to the place somewhat stronger. Through the plethora of widely available published studies that reflect upon human societal interaction, part of the research for this project sought to uncover relevant information that highlights smaller communities, their lifestyles and the nature of small town living. Having made the observation, I believe it is important to clarify again that this project is not intended to be a study of the psychology of the residents of small towns, nor does it offer any formal sociological hypothesis.

Through the early period of investigation, I uncovered a recurring theme: I found that many locals have a common familial and ancestral attachment to place. Links to the past appear to be actively maintained with their predecessors not only through family photographs, memorabilia, business or property ownership but also through the retelling and recollection of personal histories, mythological happenings and legendary characters and events, passed from one generation to the next, resulting in reinforcing a sense of local identity and belonging. These accounts conventionally remain exclusive to the locals and I found few are readily shared with outsiders. The more complex or family-orientated local stories tend to be reserved for communal recounting in gatherings with other locals.

Through the research I sought answers from reference material that might help rationalise what ties a person to one place or the other. Some people do choose to leave and move

on, yet the place they came from remains something integral and rooted within their subconscious and is reflected in their sense of identity and who they believe they are. Lippard presents the concept of place and the way in which it impacts upon people as being something like that of the junction of map coordinates, the intersections of longitude and latitude through being “temporal and spatial, personal and political” (Lippard 7). Place is uniquely and individually embedded within everyone and is interwoven with individual memory and impressions of a place’s history (7).

Place is what makes up part of who we are and we cannot escape it as it resonates from the inside of our very being. We each occupy some place that emanates our own personal human histories and memories.

1.4 The Kaipara: its peoples, towns and harbour

The Kaipara coast is acknowledged as having both New Zealand's largest enclosed harbour and the most extensive coastline in the southern hemisphere (Byrne 47). Contributing to the diversity of its complex coastline there are a host of rivers, streams, shallow estuaries, sand dunes, forests, hills, mountains, farms, towns and settlements that make up what is the larger Kaipara region. There is much history in terms of human involvement. The first European sighting of the harbour entrance is recorded in Captain Cook's logbooks as he sailed round New Zealand in 1770 and 1772 (3). By that time the Kaipara already had a long and involved Maori history.

Brian Byrne describes the manner in which then dominant Kaipara iwi Ngati Whatua occupied all of the lands around the harbour and were by Cook's day at the peak of their

power and influence over large tracts of the upper North Island (3). Maori legend dictates they have been a part of the Kaipara since around the thirteenth century, principally attracted to its rich food resource. This attraction has remained constant although title between various iwi was many times hotly contested. Through the centuries the region has been the subject of numerous wars, predatory raids, full-scale conquest, reprisal conflict and utu, and tribal occupation by most of the northern Maori tribes. The end of Maori occupation was marked by a sudden subsequent decline (3) in the Kaipara around 1825. Far North iwi, Nga Puhi, used their newly acquired European-made muskets to forcefully attack and overpower their previously dominant Ngati Whatua neighbours to their south (Sheffield 40). The change in the political and military landscape was dramatic. For nearly forty years the Kaipara was virtually unoccupied and considered too dangerous a place for Maori (41, 43).

The majority of Ngati Whatua fled over their southern borders at Tamaki inlet to the relative safety offered by their Waikato cousins (41). In an attempt to eventually move back into the unoccupied Kaipara, Ngati Whatua invited Europeans to live among them to prevent inter-tribal conflict and ensure a more lasting peace. Seeing the area's potential opportunities the first Europeans readily agreed and settlers over time began to arrive in ever-greater numbers, recognising not only the natural resources abundant in the waterways but also the mature “blue-hazed kauri groves” and forests that surrounded the harbour (47).

Lippard suggests most artists are transient and come from more than one place; while some are “confused” by those who retain a more singular sense of place, others take advantage of their “multicenteredness” (Lippard 36). I consider my investigation takes a multicentered approach. In coming across present-day descendants of earlier Kaipara

residents, the fact many families remain resident in the Kaipara generation after generation was for me one of the most fascinating aspects of my investigation. A combination of cultural ties, family heritage and nostalgic reminiscence motivates many to remain living in or near the region, aspects that would prove useful foundations to the works.



*Fig. 4: Memorial commemorating “The Albertlanders”, a non-conformist Christian sect who purchased large tracts of land off plans in England in order to establish a colonial settlement in the early 1860s. Distances, difficult access and harsh living conditions in the Kaipara quickly ended the effort and most Albertlanders moved on to Auckland. The small township of Port Albert remains as a legacy for their hopes and dreams.
(image by the author)*

1.5 Local folklore: tales from the inside

According to Finnish academic Juha Pentikäinen, the American folklorist and anthropologist, William R. Bascom, suggested that genuine folklore falls specifically within the domain of oral transmission of relevant stories that belong to or reference a specific culture (Pentikäinen 239). This perhaps could be equally so of other sectors of society, including those that reside within small towns or attach themselves to remote rural communities (239). Pentikäinen quotes Bascome: “Folklore, to the anthropologist, is a part of culture but not the whole of culture. It includes myths, legends, tales, proverbs, riddles, the texts of ballads and other songs, and other forms of lesser importance, but not folk art, folk dance, folk music, folk costume, folk medicine, folk custom, or folk belief . . . All folklore is orally transmitted, but not all that is orally transmitted is folklore” (Bascome in 1965, 28).

Pentikäinen points out that Bascom had suggested folklore

was singularly a verbal art. Many other folklorists see Bascom’s views as too narrow, because they see this as an excessively limited judgment that autocratically excludes the likes of musical ballads and folk-songs (240). For his part, Pentikäinen considers that to combine folklore and oral history as a single entity, all recollections provided by a non-literate culture would then be described only as folklore (240).

I acknowledge Pentikäinen’s concerns, although for the purposes of my exploration I sought only oral revelations from local people for the same reasons as Bascom suggests. I intentionally chose to avoid written, musical or other forms of formally recorded historical record. I wanted to hear what the people had to say for themselves without any such influences of published and more formally recorded histories.

Throughout the project exploration, I met with many local residents and through developing conversation looked to solicit explanations from them of examples of folklore that might express how they feel about the places in which they lived. I attempted in every case to guide the dialogue along the path of folklore relevant to them. I was looking for the histories, myths, and legends they thought both entertaining and representative of their town and its community. This became the prescribed start of the collaborative process I had intended and advocated for this project. As a play on Bascom's words it is part of the story but not the whole story. Understanding this was critical to satisfy the conceptual artistic expectations I had set out for the project. I was looking to develop collaboration that would provide the project with the authenticity it needed, yet it was the locals with whom I was working who ultimately were to inform me of the stories from their point of view.

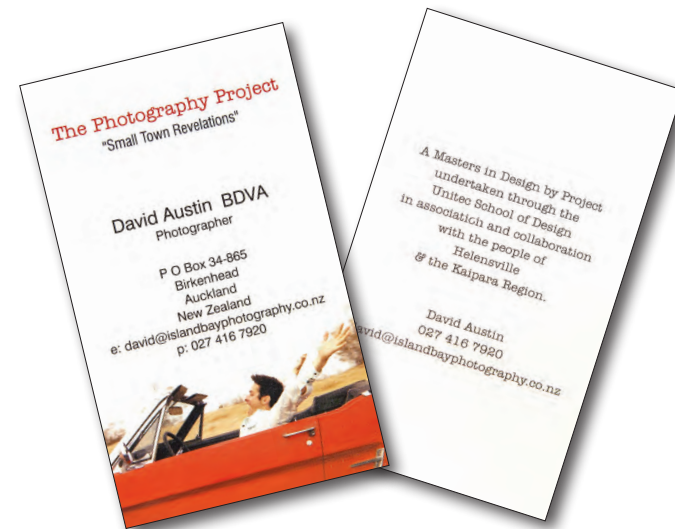


Fig. 5: Project calling cards designed and employed through exploration phase.

1.6 Sampling local personalities

The following texts are provided as a sample of the kinds of connections made during the course of the project exploration. Included are notational referencing of three local residents whom I approached. These personalities each provided their views of local identity and reflected on how a sense of place affected them. Each shared examples of recollections of local histories, myth and legend.

1.6.1 *Greg Smith:*

Through asking local residents whom they would recommend as being knowledgeable and informed, many around southern Kaipara region immediately suggested Greg Smith. Employed by the RNZAF as both environmental ranger and security manager, Greg's job is to administer the air force's bombing range at the very northern tip of the South Head of

the Kaipara Harbour entrance from the Tasman Sea. Greg is very much a man of the land, far happier patrolling the sand dunes and pine forest blocks of South Head in a four-wheel-drive than in piloting a desk. He does not suffer fools gladly, and what he has seen and heard in his tenure as ranger beggars belief.

For what appears at first appearance as a quiet and isolated place, the South Head is often not. Many people regularly transgress for all sorts of reasons, often illegally, into what is a dangerous 'no-go' safety zone and wildlife conservation area. The armed forces have for decades used these northern dunes as a firing and bombing range and the remains of various munitions and ordinance pepper the landscape, much of it buried just below the surface. It is Greg Smith's job to keep people out, away and above all, well informed.

Greg proudly claims his tangata whenua of Ngati Whatua descent and holds a deeply sincere cultural appreciation for Maori history, in particular their pre-European and place in New Zealand's colonial and post-colonial history. With an exceptional knowledge of Maori history, he happily recalls story after story of localised histories and legends. Greg's most engaging stories were his recollections of Kaipara history and folklore, and his superb ability to name most of various Kaipara-based taniwha and their mystical stories, their *modus operandi* and whereabouts around the harbour.

Yet, it was a more contemporary story Greg Smith related to me that appealed most, as it speaks incredibly to the archetypal *kiwi ingenuity* of putting things together *with Number 8 wire*, an aspect of daily life that appears more prominent in small towns and rural New Zealand. Greg revealed a story his late father had told him of a seemingly preposterous happening that occurred around the time Greg himself was born,

sometime during the late 1950s. The story relates how one day a certain well-known local identity appeared on foot at his father's automobile workshop. He was to make a thoroughly remarkable proposition. On this fellow's back was strapped an old motorcycle motor, in one hand he brandished a steel shaft and the other he held up an battered wooden aircraft propeller! Greg suggested these items were probably sourced directly from the extensive Helensville town rubbish dump.

The man demanded the mechanics to put all his 'bits and pieces' together to build a flying machine... so he could transport himself freely around the Kaipara. In a time where only the more financially secure were able to afford vehicles, his idea was motivated through a desire to save himself the hardship of walking everywhere. Needless to say, no one at the workshop was willing to actually build it for him. He was talked out of his preposterous proposition.

Many locals knew that this particular chap had a reputation for elaborate public practical jokes, although to this day it is not known whether he would have tried to fly the machine had it indeed been built. Later in the exploration I met up with the potential flyer's daughter, another South Head resident born and bred. During one of our discussions, I queried if she had heard about this *flying machine* story involving her father. Her response was interesting: no, she had not heard about it, but knowing her father as she had, she stated she was not the least bit surprised that he could have probably done it... and done it all seriousness!

This story is encapsulated in the tableau work, *Helensville c.1959*.



*Fig. 6: Ranger and wild life enforcement officer, Greg Smith (Ngati Whatua), checks for expired ordinance around the edge of an impact crater on the RNZAF bombing range, located on the northern tip of South Head, Kaipara; 10th April 2012.
(image by the author)*

1.6.2 Mrs Flora Thirkettle:

Mrs Flora Thirkettle is very much the embodiment of a living legend for local people residing in the southern parts of the Kaipara. At eighty-five years of age, with thirty-five of those years as a fisher-woman netting flounder and mullet on the harbour, Flora at first appears modest and unassuming yet she has garnered a considerable respect in her community that few others have achieved.

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As a young widow, Flora and her five children arrived in the Kaipara in 1957. She also raised a number of foster children. She purchased a river-side house at the end of Baker Street in Helensville, “because it came with a boat” (Thirkettle). She subsequently built and constructed alone an extensive series of timber boating docks on the banks of the Kaipara River, still used today by the local cruising club and locally based commercial vessels.

Flora still lives in that house, now a little more run down and lived-in, shaded by huge oak trees she herself planted by seed, with the same original boat, *Olive*, rising and falling with each tide in retirement, moored in a cutting into her back yard. Over several meetings Flora became more relaxed with this interested stranger who turned up for tea and biscuits and she began to open up in terms of conversation.

I was at that stage exploring other potential formats for project work, and undertook a photo-shoot of her and *Olive* together early one Sunday morning, “at a time the tide was best!” (Thirkettle). To encourage Flora to talk I asked her about *Olive* and about her surroundings and her past. Her revelations were typically humble, although one tale immediately stood out and appealed to me. The story related to her taking in a wayward local boy around seven or eight years of age from an apparently dysfunctional family background sometime in the early 1970s.



Fig. 7: Mrs Flora Thirkettle aka “The Queen of the Kaipara”, age 85, and most prized possession, her fishing boat, “Olive”, moored at rear of her Baker Street home on the banks of the Kaipara River, Helensville: 4th March 2012 (image by the author)

Flora would go net fishing over the weekends when her own children were out of school and were able to help with the tasks required for boat operations. She arranged with the boy's parents for him to go with her on a flounder and mullet-netting trip; they had no objection, they just wanted him out of the way. The boy himself had never been on a boat before. Flora had checked the weather as she always did, however, the conditions worsened unexpectedly by the afternoon to such an extent that she chose to return early as she became worried how her new young deckhand might react to rough water.

As she headed *Olive* for the relative calm at the edge of mangrove plantations Flora noticed the boy was looking decidedly ill. Her own children had already retired to the back of the boat and were themselves no longer looking good due to all the pitching and yawing. Flora knew she had to act quickly to avoid the obvious. She summoned the boy into the cabin and gave him the wheel. "Now, you stand here, take this and I'll go up the

front of the boat. You just watch where I point and steer in that direction. You got it?" The boy did exactly what he was told and slowly but steadily they weaved their way back down the edges of the harbour to Helensville. Years later, that boy grew up and today operates as a successful commercial fishing boat ventures on the Kaipara Harbour. It was a perfect story.

However as I later expressed my interest in working with Flora further to develop concepts for illustrating the tale things changed quickly. She expectantly became circumspect and reserved. It was a reaction I had not anticipated or expected. When I asked what her reservations were Flora replied she just did not like being the centre of attention... she just preferred to stay in the background - and that was final! This was just her *modus operandi* in her town. No amount of subsequent enthusiasm or persuasion on my part would change her mind. I was left to ponder and respect Flora's decision and just had to move on.

1.6.3 Ruth Tamihana-Milne

A regular consultation process developed with Ruth Tamihana-Milne began after first receiving an invitation to meet her at a ceremony celebrating the Waitangi Tribunal settlement between the Crown and iwi Ngāti Whatua, held at Shelly Beach, South Head, Kaipara, on the 9th of September 2011.

We had mutually agreed to meet so I could introduce my project to her and she to clarify her attachment to the area (whilst Ruth now lives in Auckland along with husband Dave and her whanau and is no longer residing in the Kaipara, she regularly returns to her Ngāti Whatua o Kaipara roots, with extended whanau located in both the Northern and Southern Kaipara). Over many meetings, I found Ruth a valuable resource for information surrounding most aspects of Maoritanga, tikanga, and for her passionate advocacy for the Kaipara, in discussing her turangawaewae (place to stand), her sense of place.



*Fig. 8: Dave Milne and Ruth Tamihana-Milne (Ngāti Whatua), informed and proud advocates for both the northern and southern Kaipara, enjoying one of many korero with the author at home in Western Springs, Auckland, 17th December 2012
(image by the author)*

Consistently exuding good humour, opinion and enthusiasm, conversations with Ruth never lacked for content. She tells many a great story but it was the first one related to me at Shelly Beach that stood out for me for potential. This was the legend of *Rona and the Moon*.

I was enthralled and inspired by Rona's tale and soon began to explore how to use it to represent the Shelly Beach settlement as part of my works. However, a few months into producing this particular work Ruth urgently contacted me with some sobering news: she was recommending I cease plans to illustrate Rona's story for my project. Ruth advised she had discussed my project and proposed illustration with senior members of her iwi including kaumatua, relatives, and others who knew of the Rona legend. A number of issues had been raised that were of considerable concern for them and she urgently wanted me to know before I went further.

These were namely:

- firstly the story of *Rona and the Moon* is not known to be specific to Shelly Beach, or elsewhere in the Kaipara Region, for that matter;
- several iwi claim Rona's story as theirs, and the nature and meanings of the tale differ somewhat with each. It appears there are too many questions as to the origins of the legend;

- it is intensely debated amongst many iwi as to whether Rona indeed references a woman, a young girl, or a legendary fisherman who lived in an area once known as *Kaipatiki*, the location of present day Parakai, on the banks of the Kaipara River just north of Helensville (Sheffield 27);

- an illustrated version of the story has long been in published in the form of a pre-school children's book (in this Rona is portrayed as a young girl). This publication is itself contentious for some Maori;

- I add my own issue: an acknowledged lack of tikanga (this being an understanding and common sense from a Maori world view) on the part of the author.

I fully appreciated Ruth's recommendations and agreed and ceased further work on this story.

Ruth, husband Dave and I held hui (meetings) on numerous occasions to korero (discuss) the direction and course of the project. Usually occurring on Monday evenings, although we

were due to korero for only an hour, the meetings frequently went on much longer.

Through Ruth I sought to uncover history and legend related to Maori involvement in the Kaipara, from pre-European, colonial and post-colonial histories, and also through to more contemporary times. In addition to revealing much in the way of Kaipara histories Ruth often provided specific and tangential interpretations to help unravel cultural nuances as well as discuss the philosophical and sociological ramifications of the region's various economic boom and bust periods. The project could have been completed with her revelations alone!

From a practical and creative perspective, it was disappointing not to be able to work on the legend of *Rona and the Moon*, I could see great potential in the story for illustrative possibilities and was looking forward to the production of the work. However, in taking stock of the issues and the widely accepted view that

the story of the girl in the moon itself did not necessarily occur in the Kaipara, it was appropriate not to proceed further with its production. To continue might also have proved ethically and morally controversial. I accepted Ruth's recommendations and moved onto working on other potential opportunities with her. There were plenty more revelations to consider and one of these now underpins the work, *Dargaville c. 1950*.

There was one thing that Ruth said during our many discussions, something that resonated yet was a simple truth. She stated that although I might choose to explore, appreciate and even like the Kaipara, and maybe even one day move there to live, I will never be *of* the Kaipara. "To be of the Kaipara", she said, "is a right only those who are born and raised there can have" (Tamihana-Milne).



Fig. 9: Kaipara locals catch up after the rahui protest at the Smith family bach, (from left to right) Richard Nahi, Greg Smith, Helen Smith, Michelle Nahi and Pearl Hill at Pouto Point northern heads of the Kaipara Harbour, Northland 10th March 2012 (image by the author)

Chapter 2: Getting Involved: Participation or collaboration?

2.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter discusses third-party involvement and examines the collaborative process as the principal motivating methodology applied throughout the course of this project. The project was implicitly reliant upon instituting interactive relationships with the people living in small towns and communities. Indeed, meeting and talking with local residents became fundamental for the conceptual process. Tangible interaction was essential for shaping the collaboration with local inhabitants. Their constructive participation was critical for generating visual subject matter.

2.2 Notions of Collaboration

When planning the aims and objectives for this project, there was a particular component I sought to incorporate within the intended methodology, something that I believed would provide the stimuli necessary to create appropriate and meaningful work. This was the notion of collaboration.

It was the idea of collaboratively sharing the conceptual creativity intended for the project with the communities at the centre of the investigation that appealed most to me. I had wanted to take on something innovative that would require I step outside my comfort zone through working alongside others. It was very much my project but I knew to make it work I would need to work closely with others. I was at the same time concerned.

I experienced, and have continued to experience, feelings of anxiety, as I had never previously undertaken any form of collaboration. I accepted, even at the early stages of preparation, that sharing the direction of the project with others would require application of a definitive framework related to the level of any other involvement and how to maintain directorial control over the project. It would be all too easy for the control to diffuse and gradually pass on to others, as I was to discover later during the early phase of production work. I knew that I would be testing the perception of collaboration held by some.

Many a contemporary artist lays claim to the method of collaboration. It appears the word is one of the most used within the contemporary art world, as well as an accepted art practice methodology that has become increasingly prevalent over recent decades (Dunhill and O'Brien).

Dunhill and O'Brien argue the origins of collaborative art practice are to be found in the Western social upheavals of the 1960s and in particular within the student turmoil happening across the United States and Europe at the time. They go on to suggest that present-day artists increasingly include collaboration in their practice as a way to move the importance away from the previously insular single artist convention to one that is more socially involved (Dunhill and O'Brien).

Charles Green in turn claims "that collaboration was a crucial element in the transition from modernist to post-modernist art that a trajectory consisting of a series of artistic collaborations emerges clearly from the late 1960s conceptualism onwards", a seemingly identical argument to that of Dunhill and O'Brien (Green). Much more has been written about the impact, influence and role of collaboration in art and as an art practice.

Interestingly, the critical thinking and writing I have read about collaborative efforts within the world of art make no mention of there being a definitive amount, extent, nature or level to that collaborative contribution for it to be defined as collaboration. My view is that the level of multi-contributor involvement in an art practice cannot be set at any specific level of participation for it to be deemed collaboration. If anything, it comes down to the collaborators themselves as to whether the work itself is indeed collaborative. It is a matter of interpretation. I attempted to explore collaboration as a way of avoiding the colonising tendencies of photography mentioned by Sontag, in an attempt to facilitate the 'locals' to tell their own stories.

2.3 About documentary; empathy and objectivity

Elizabeth Coffman hypothesises that “if you have too much empathy for your subject and you give away too much content of equipment control, you will sacrifice objectivity and the overall quality and distribution of a piece” (Coffman 74). As already mentioned, this project is not intended as a documentary; however, parallels with the genre are for me recognisable and familiar. This became apparent through the project’s exploration and research where characteristics that make up the scope of documentary photographic and film-making are evident, such as ethnography, site-specific investigations, interview techniques and the dissemination of stories gathered. The fundamental difference with this project is that it is founded upon the establishment and building of empathetic collaborative relationships with its subjects, the residents of small towns, in contrast to a traditional objective documentary approach to develop storytelling practices.

Objective storytelling is a method for documentary photographers and filmmakers who also work with their subjects in order to build the story they, as documenter, wish to portray. In her article, *Documentary and Collaboration: Placing the Camera in the Community*, Coffman acknowledges the development of collaborative media relations with subject communities has always been a challenge for documenters in terms of maintaining objectivity (Coffman 64). She contends the documenter and the subject participate together in a collaborative association (65) as an acknowledgment of that objectivity, yet “it is a relationship in which the film maker maintains an ethno-perspective throughout” (65).

The issue, as I view it, is that objectivity is a basis for which a documenter might stay aloof, distant and detached from the subject matter at the centre of his investigation. Through being fundamentally objective, a documenter potentially claims a degree of fairness, neutrality and impartiality, and

thus asserts a form of credibility for his work (65). The process of documentary-making is reliant on a careful management by the documenter of both the objective and empathetic approach towards developing collaboration with their subject in order to succeed in delivering the story.

Objectivity on its own appears an outdated model for documentary, as the final outcome in terms of production may potentially be viewed as ambiguous, detached and equivocal. It appears more common over recent years, for documenters to err on the side of empathy towards their subjects in order to produce more emotionally powerful work. Such changes within the documentary approach are made plainly evident through *The Kaipara Affair*, a work by noted Maori film-maker, Barry Barclay, where a more empathetically personalised methodology results in a more emotionally powerful and compelling insight.

To this end, Barclay chose to pioneer “a method of going into remote communities and recording respectfully in a way that would engage the national audience” (Barclay). He sees his evolving respectful documentary process as a conduit for “...a new sort of language”, a more sensitive way to tell the stories of his subject matter (Barclay). I felt moved and influenced by the sensitivity that emanates through viewing *The Kaipara Affair* and acknowledge having developed feelings of considerable empathy towards the most hardened of the film’s protagonists. I looked to Barclay’s prescribed approach as a methodology model for better developing mutually respectful collaborative relationships with my own subject matter.

2.4 Methodology in practice

The intended outcome for this project was focused upon creating a body of work that offered and suggested answers to, as well as substantiating, the objectives of my research proposal. I had to ensure the parties I wanted involved in the project contributed as had been anticipated. The contact process typically commenced with me approaching a readily identifiable and accessible resource within the community, such as a information office or someone operating or working in a local business premises. This was largely straightforward as I inquired after those in the community who knew something about the place and its history and, importantly, would speak readily to people about it. Essentially I was after a referral from within the community to somebody else in the same community they might know. This proved such a useful and successful technique that I utilised it in every approach.



Fig. 10: New Zealand's Attorney General, Minister for Arts Culture and Heritage and Treaty of Waitangi Negotiations Minister, the Hon. Chris Finlayson, the Minister for Maori Affairs, Hon. Dr. Peta Sharples and Maori Affairs chair, Hon. Tau Henare lead the Crown delegation to come face-to-face with iwi, Ngati Whatua o Kaipara, to successfully conclude historical grievance negotiations related to the southern Kaipara, Shelly Beach, 9th September 2011 (image by the author)

I often obtained at least one or two names along with telephone numbers of local residents to contact. Applying what became an often repeated and somewhat well-rehearsed introduction process, I then sought to cultivate relationships with these knowledgeable locals.

It is important to clarify that prior to this project I had never met the people I was visiting. This raised a personal concern as I find meeting people for the first time a challenge. This is especially so when approaching strangers with an ulterior motive in mind. I have long found the art of *cold calling* difficult and something of a mental barrier. The issue was that I knew I had to successfully sell the concept of this project to every person I met at the outset before I could proceed. Making initial contact and arranging first meetings with the local people was just part of the greater task at hand and this challenge was important to overcome for my project to succeed. I had no option but to cope and get on with it.

The objectives of the project were such that I was always going to need to meet a considerable number of local people for it to work largely as I had anticipated. Through undertaking numerous meetings, a standardised approach began to develop for the presentation of an initial greeting followed by

a concise introduction that ensured I was then able to outline the motivation, aims and objectives underscoring the project.

Also discussed was how local participation and contribution was an integral component of the projects conceptual process, something that initiated the start of the proposed collaborative methodology process. Once mutual understanding had been established I aimed to guide the subsequent conversation towards the discovery of reasons for their attachment to the place. I looked to focus discussion towards what they knew of formal and better known histories relevant to their locale as well as trying to find out about the less well-known past events and characters and how they expressed these revelations as contributing in some way towards local identity.

These sessions with local residents were relaxed affairs and for good reason: I was seeking to explore people's memories and recollections and I worked hard to put them at ease.

Face-to-face meetings were held in their homes, workplace lunch-rooms, community halls or on farm paddocks, rolling sand dunes or forests, anywhere where locals felt more comfortable. The circumstances demanded sensitivity, and more importantly respect to ensure they felt completely at ease discussing the subject matter.

It was critical for the project's credibility, authenticity, and relevancy that local contribution could be attached to the project. Finding the right small town resident to speak to was not an impossible task by any means. I was surprised just how open and honest the people were, as I had expected this to be one of the most difficult missions I would face as part of my exploration process.

2.5 Exploration

The first small town residents I chose to work with for making pictures for this project turned a misunderstanding into somewhat of a creative adventure. It was also my first experience of the phenomenon of *event culture*, where costumed grown adults re-enact events from history yet it appears the inevitable result is that “the line between truth and fiction becomes blurred” (Kubicki 167). Event culture is essentially the practice of people congregating together to mutually enjoy the activity of dressing up in period costume in order to re-enact and represent people and events from history. Through playing out a living history, however, the consequence is an unavoidable reconceiving and reinvention of history (168). History becomes a fictionalised fabrication.

It was a misunderstanding that became a *happy accident* of sorts. The local residents were members of the Helensville &

Districts Historical Society, a dedicated group of volunteer locals who seek enthusiastically to preserve the early settler and founding history of this southern Kaipara. Although I was a total stranger, I was pleasantly surprised I was pleasantly surprised that both the Society’s organising committee and members were interested to hear about my project and eager to contribute towards its objectives. They were just as enthusiastic to share with me their own knowledge and view of the area’s past. As I got to meet and talk with the members of the Society, it became apparent that something was out of place. The most obvious was the average age of the members as most were beyond retirement age and were involved in the Society as it provided them company, kept them busy and focused on history of interest to them. They were mainly of British and European heritage in origin. What was also apparent was that not many of them had obvious Maori heritage.

This was striking as my research of the region pointed to a long Maori history in the Kaipara. Maori history appeared to be acknowledged almost anecdotally, as the background story to the European founders and later settlers of Helensville. For the Historical Society members, it is the period of time after the arrival of the first European settlers that was their primary focus of interest. The reverence for selective history by Western historical societies is not in itself unusual, as Lucy Lippard again suggests, as the “...societies represent the way people know or see their places - in fragments” (Lippard 96), resulting in reflecting a past that has little in common with the real history.

The shoot itself occurred fortuitously and was not intended for the day it indeed happened. I had arranged with the president of the Society to present a pitch seeking members cooperation at their weekly meeting. Upon my arrival it became apparent that there had been a misunderstanding.

All there were fully costumed, dressed in mid-to-late nineteenth century European settler period-piece costume, ready and “waiting to be photographed by some photographer chap turning from Auckland” (Colville). In spite of being unprepared it was fortunate that I had a camera with me and was subsequently able to get some straightforward character portraits. Outside weather conditions precluded photography outdoors so the members quickly arranged to shoot inside the historical Helensville Magistrates Courthouse using dimly diffused window light as the sole source of illumination.

The light being what it was, I was limited to taking relatively close-up portraits of each re-enactor as they posed near a window for some natural light. I had with me an older digital camera of average capability but absolutely no lighting equipment at all. The poor light proved a challenge. I achieved a satisfactory result of sorts, an adequate outcome given the conditions. Little did I realise, these portraits were to prove

extremely useful towards the final production phase of the project work. After the shoot we finally discussed the project. I was able to elaborate on the project and its objectives and the proposed collaborative creative process. I was exceedingly relieved as my first audience were all satisfied, happy to consider doing a more formally planned re-shoot at a later date.



Fig.11: Members of the Helensville & Districts Historical Society reenactment group - obligingly costumed for 'some photographer from Auckland', 19th September 2011 (image by the author)

2.6 Developing collaboration

Throughout the exploration process, awareness of these concepts imposed a degree of anxiety. I was concerned that those at the very core of the project investigation, the local residents, might choose not to participate, however positively motivated my intentions. Indeed, rejection was a factor on a few occasions. I discovered that several local people I approached had already been the subject of other previous documentary projects and not all had fond memories of their involvement. There was in some instances a noticeable reservation to overcome before I proposed this projects concept to them.

On my first visit to the South Head area I became impressed by a two-storey mural painted on the outside wall of the of the Shelly Beach cafe. On a later exploratory visit I met an artist and her mother hard at work painting similar artwork on the

walls of brand new council-owned changing sheds located only metres away from the cafe. We got talking. A long-term resident artist of the Kaipara, Helen Beech had just recently moved away from Helensville to establish a new family home with her partner in Puhoi, some forty kilometres away. Helen was now painting artwork on the new block as she had been commissioned by the Auckland Super City and quickly established herself as the artist responsible for the cafe wall mural, painting it in 2005. This was a pivotal moment, as I saw an opportunity to involve a 'local' - or one who had been until recently - more seriously in my exploration. I saw it as chance to test some of the creative intentions and conceptual theories I had developed to that point. Helen was initially somewhat reticent about being involved. She admitted she had previously been poorly treated through another investigation. However, through several subsequent discussions we resolved issues to her satisfaction and agreed to work together on ideas to represent her part in the Kaipara.

The painting of the cafe mural at first look appeared fairly innocuous; however, as I saw the mural as conveying a relevant local story and being so tangibly part of the history of Shelly Beach, I was keen to explore its potential for visual expression. Helen Beech and I met to discuss concepts before deciding upon a proposal she based off 'stitched' iPad images put together in Photoshop to form as a much larger panorama of the scene. This panorama would be produced to fit a billboard size frame. We agreed the work would include all those present at the time the cafe mural was put together, this being Helen, her partner, all their seven children, and her mother, as a interpretative re-enactment.

We all came together at Shelly Beach one weekend morning. The idea had been that everyone would 'replay' their part, what they were doing at the time back in 2005. A difficulty immediately became apparent when the children, now all teenagers or young adults, expressed their lack of interest.



*Fig. 12: Early formative work: Beech family at Shelly Beach, Kaipara 4th March 2012
(image by the author)*

The other family members simply had little interest or buy in. It was something their mother had got them to do. The result was a series of very straight forward environmental portraits, which even when stitched together to produce the panorama effect in post-production, appeared unresolved. In reviewing the exercise I realised I had reached a seminal point in my project exploration. The outcome was visually not what I had hoped for. I also recognised the panorama expressed a story relevant only to those who were on the picture.

What is seen appears as a family story and did not reflect the wider community. There was no connection with others of the Shelly Beach community. In my haste to ‘find’ a local story I had given away too much directorial control and it showed. My attempts at collaborating with Helen had resulted in me technically facilitating her vision, the outcome of which was visually and conceptually problematic. I recognised that whilst I wished to collaborate with local people I needed to find a way of achieving a better balance of directorial control.

All was not lost, however, as I contacted Helen again with another concept; something that would better involve all her family *and* potentially better attach the cafe artwork story to the wider Shelly Beach community. As a response to her earlier panorama idea, I suggested we re-photograph the entire family, but look to capture each person holding a panel fashioned with parts of Helen's cafe mural.



Fig. 13: Another early formative work: concept with Helen Beech holding panel from Shelly Beach cafe mural, 17th March 2012 (image by the author)

The process again took some time and effort to coordinate as family members lived in several different North Island towns. Over several separate photo-shoots, I assembled the various panel portraits together. In terms of the end result, and in spite of these further experiments with formulating the work, I still remained unsure of the sustainability of my adopted methodology.

My project could not have become resolved, and simply would not have come together in the way I intended, if I had not worked alongside others in one form or another, at one time or another. The blueprint for the project methodology outlined an intention to involve other parties. These were the local residents of small towns and communities, in which the stories are placed, who were to contribute primarily as storytellers, and becoming providers of the underlying narratives. If they wished to participate further, some were offered the role of play the actual character representations.

From the time it was conceived and as the project progressed, collaboration became a catch-cry of how I wanted to work with the locals. The lessons learned through experimenting with collaboration at Shelley Beach, resulted in my decision to shift the collaborative dimension away from the visual aspects of the project and focus more on the stories. Collaboration allows different expertise to be brought to a common challenge. The locals had the expertise at the level of the narrative, while I had the expertise with the visuals and this was the way the project would move forward.

In many ways the exploration process was similar to that for a documentary. There were ethnographic issues to consider in carrying out an investigation focused on a specific group of people. I became conscious of the sensitivity needed and aware of the imposition on local people. However, new relationships created were critical to my work. I had to ensure the trust placed in me by the local residents was reciprocated

in a sympathetic and mutually respectable manner. I looked to collaboration as the way to involve them more closely with the project. The oral retelling of local folklore and which parts of these stories might be illustrated and how the scenes illustrated would appropriately be represented became the major collaborative features of the project.

Lucy Lippard proposes a suggested methodology in which to undertake art practice that involved those within a specific and already defined community. She maintains that art directed by the “place ethic”, art which includes working with resident local people from a specific place, was very much collaborative, “at least to the extent of seeking information, advice and feedback from the community in which the work will be placed” (Lippard 286). Her proposition defines well the nature of the local participation and contribution I maintained throughout this project



Fig. 14: Dargaville Museum wall mural depicting the schooner, Huia, a Kaipara-based trading ship that travelled between Dargaville and Lyttleton as it approaches the Mangawhare Wharf on the Wairoa River, Dargaville. 1910. One of a series of the museum's murals representing periods of local history by Auckland artist, Louis Stratham (Mogford) (image by the author)



*Fig. 15: Iwi members of Ngati Whatua and other concerned Kaipara locals participate in the 2012 rahui protest. The rahui (ban) ceremony was held on the sands at Pouto Point beach on the southern-most tip of the northern heads of the Kaipara Harbour in opposition to the controversial installation of 200 underwater power turbines in the harbour mouth by Crest Energy Ltd as sanctioned by the Northland District Council, 10th March 2012
(image by the author)*

Chapter 3: Revealing history, myth & legend

3.1 Chapter Introduction

The interpretation of *history* is defined as a record or account of past events, and all that is preserved and recorded of the past, in particular that in written format (History). This concept references the formality of official and public record and published accounts that relate to actual and specific characters or events from earlier times. I have a great interest in history, past events and happenings. History is an absorbing subject that offers a seemingly endless array of fascinating narratives. It is the nature of how histories are recollected, how these stories differ from other recollections of the same person or event, and how history and time potentially affect whoever provides the recollection itself that also fascinate. History captivates both my curiosity and imagination through the intertwining and interconnections of stories that involve real people and actual events over time.

As the consultation process with local residents developed, it became increasingly apparent that their revelations comprised not only formal and officially recognised recorded history, but also less well-known recollections. I found people would often recount stories that were the unpublished and unofficial histories of the people and places they lived in. These I began to refer to, albeit respectfully, as the ‘little histories’ of places, being no less important than formally documented accounts from history but seemingly far more relevant and personal for the people telling the story.

A mix of formal and recognised historical accounts alongside these quirky idiosyncratic revelations of the past had one notable consequence. Where there was an absence of written or photographic evidence they become reliant predominantly on personal recollections in order for them to perpetuate, thus often allowing for a more flexible retelling. I am certain there

was a significant element of embellishment to the less well-known stories. The outcome for the project was being able to consider potential subject matter far beyond that initially considered. Both formal history and these ‘little histories’ appeared to carry a similar weight for those sharing them with me and I was not about to let the opportunity for such locally specific and distinctive subject matter slip away...

3.2 Ethnography

Through his essay, *The Artist as Ethnographer*, Hal Foster questions the significance of those artists who choose to partake in pseudo-anthropological investigations of specifically located communities with the best motivations for “political engagement and institutional transgression only to have the work recoded as social outreach, economic development, public relations... or art” (Foster 303). His concern stems from a strongly held cynicism towards those

artists who assert they undertake their practice through being objective outsiders, while he sees “the assumption of outside-ness”, as being somewhat problematic (304). Foster sees such “self-othering” notions as readily evolving into a feeling of “self-absorption”, at which point an “ethnographic self-fashioning” occurs, driven by a strong sense of self-importance in order to justify an approach to an investigation (304).

Foster asserts some artists approach collaborative community investigations seemingly with the best of intentions, only to be exposed as exploiting the outcome as a result of a limited engagement with the community they’re working with. He suggests this occurs where the artists attempt to decide the communities ethnographic status (306). Indeed, his views appear as resonant and something of a seminal lightning rod for this project in terms of appreciating its motivations. I recognise my own project potentially falls within the scope of

Foster's apprehensions. His questioning appears as something of a critique for my approach for an ethnographic study. This recognition prompted a timely review of the nature of and motivation for my community-focused collaboration. Being better informed of the critical concerns, in particular those concerns related to outsider objectivity, I am better prepared to understand, incorporate and articulate the direction prescribed for this project.

Foster acknowledges he is not completely pessimistic and recognises that some artists have utilised opportunities to collaborate with specific communities in entirely innovative ways, such as where the artist worked "to recover suppressed histories" (306). I consider this project has adopted the kind of innovative methodology he speaks of, certainly in terms of the collaborative practice employed. It is also seeking to recover lesser-known histories relevant to small town residents through initiating an empathetic and interactive approach.

It is the concern Foster raises in respect of the overlapping of one's own unconscious views above those of other communities, combined with a critical misrecognition of artistic motivations and investigations, of which I am now more aware and wary. I am not at all dismissive of Foster's analyses of the pseudo-ethnographic motives.

3.3 Establishing contact

I consciously made the decision not to live permanently, or even semi-permanently for that matter, in the communities I investigate for this project. I also consider that any attempt at becoming part of the community myself would simply not contribute further to the success of the project. This notion was reinforced upon hearing some local people indicate they had been resident in their towns for many years and yet still consider themselves as *newbies*, *townies* and unlike established local never truly being *of* the place.

I initially approached the project exploration through wanting to remain ostensibly an objective outsider. This soon evolved into a preference to be viewed by local people as an empathetic outsider. The primary objective for exploring notions of local identity and the ways in which the communities of small towns might choose to express it included adopting a collaborative

practice. For me the project's research question would only be answered through the cultivation and application of a mutually respectful interaction process with local residents. Through the experiences gained in the developmental stages of the project I subsequently sought genuine interaction that I believed could be viewed as a critically robust collaborative practice.

I approached this project with an appreciation that not everything referred to occurred a hundred and fifty years ago upon the arrival of the first European settlers. There was much to consider from earlier pre-European settler times. However, most of the revelations by locals referred to happenings of more recent times. I chose to explore how, and if, more contemporary events could sit alongside long-past historical revelations. Considering both myths and legends allowed the option of including subject matter from contemporary revelations.

3.4 Story selection: the locals decide

Why does one tableau show us something of a perhaps more widely known recognisable recorded history, while the next shows us a quirky, unusual or eccentric local legend; a story that only those in the know would know? I believe it is only natural for the viewer to ask why the subject matter varies, in terms of contrasting dates, in the appearance of the characters, in their costume, hairstyle poses and props. I will explain below.

Another story established itself alongside the stories portrayed; one that developed theoretically as I progressed. Each image represents somebody's revelation, a recollection of something they view as distinguishable, as an affirmation of their place; something that defines local identity. It was the locals themselves who elevated the "little histories", stories of past characters and events, to the same level of importance

as official recorded history. It became apparent there was an obvious blurring of the lines between formal, historically recorded fact, local folklore and family histories.

I would suggest now that this occurred as a direct result of the recollections usually being conversationally made in a convivial, cordial and relaxed atmosphere, rather than within a formal environment or written text. That was the nature of my exploration. As I spoke with local people, they shared with me the sorts of stories that would generally be related better orally. It is simply how people speak to each other; embellishment, exaggeration and elaboration appear - each as fundamental to human conversational and storytelling skills.

This in itself is testimony to the efficacy of a collaborative methodology through a discovery of the 'little histories' that emerged through the collaborative spirit of the project,

as without this collaboration the little histories would have remained hidden. This is what makes what somebody says interesting - and the locals I met were no different. The local people I spoke with appeared to consistently look at their own personalised histories as having little difference between the quirky and the formally established. The events all happened at that place at one time or another, and therein is the common ground. I fully embrace this discovery, this idiosyncrasy. My work is intended to represent these same levels of equality between events and time, at the deliberately conscious expense of importance. The constructed works of *Small Town Revelations* are the making of a polemic political statement. I am claiming through my work the visualising of a collective social debate inciting social consciousness and awareness.



*Fig. 16: Ruawai wairua (spirit), visitor welcome sign at Ruawai,
northern Kaipara, 8th December 2012
(image by the author)*



Fig. 17. "The Death of Socrates" by Jacques-Louis David (1787)

Chapter 4: Visual language and theatrical motivation

4.1 Chapter Introduction:

This chapter discusses the influence of those practitioners from the visual arts whose work has inspired and provided creative direction for this project. Outlined are the practices applied in the production from initial concept to finished work. The text provides detail of the construction process itself, the making of a photographic image as opposed to the act of taking a picture, from a initial conceptualising of the montage through to creation of a large-scale visual representation.

4.1 Tableau: Allegory and Scale

“Indeed, history is nothing more than a tableau of crimes and misfortunes”. Voltaire (1694-1778)

The word tableau has its origins in 17th Century French is thought to have derived from the Latin word *tabula*, referencing a table or board, possibly a connotation for a large picture or painted image (tableau). The word itself is now also accepted English. To define a tableau is to describe a picture that portrays some pictorial scene, or a picturesque group of people or objects. Tableau is also used to describe a representation picture, scene, or setting by one or more persons suitably costumed and posed, or attractively posed as if in a painting.

I have always held a desire to produce large-scale pictorial imagery for this project. Having been fortunate to visit the Musée du Louvre in Paris a few years ago I recall being enthralled by both the large dimensions and exquisite content of many of the painted scenes and portraits exhibited. Grand and powerful, the sheer size of the works left a lasting impression. The works of many contemporary art photographers now appear similarly influenced by scale, often ostensibly to emulate the power and grandeur that emanates from large-scale paintings.

Provocative New York-based art photographer Robert Mapplethorpe exemplified large-scale imagery through his argument “to make pictures big is to make them more powerful” (Morrisroe 324). Somewhat satirically, Morrisroe suggests Mapplethorpe’s claim derives more from his obsession for blurring the lines between art museum paintings and his own large-scale photographic works of art, all very

much a calculated act by the artist to increase the auction price and value of his artwork. Morrisroe suggests that much like the contemporary photographic works of the time by artists such as Cindy Sherman and the Starn twins, Mapplethorpe deliberately created enormously sized reproductions of his works so that they “could hold the wall” alongside paintings of equal size (324).

I have been particularly intrigued by the elaborately detail and allegory found in the neoclassical paintings of Jacques Louis-David, including the imposing *Death of Socrates*, images that bring together conceptual idealism with a powerful theatrical drama. David’s tableaux evidence careful and deliberate consideration for aspect, scale and perspective; objects and buildings within the scene appear straight and aligned to the pictures frame. Principal subject matter is judiciously painted more vividly to appear as if illuminated by theatre stage lighting, while the supporting backdrops are dimly lit.

Tableaux by nature are inherently a vehicle for allegory. Much like an exciting fiction novel, often tableaux provide the viewer not only a central narrative but also a number of sub-plots, offering up a 'feast for the eye'. My images are designed to be exhibited either through printed media or projected to suit almost any output gamut due to their size, shape and scale. Many practitioners working in the visual arts have created graphic representations that encapsulate a whole story within a single image. Critical to this work would appear to be the issue of which part of the story to illustrate; to decide which aspects will include the necessary visual clues that best outline the narrative and as much as possible of the story behind it, thus evidencing my own present-day reflection upon it.

Graham Clarke hypothesises that Victor Burgin's *Office at Night, No. 1*, an extraordinary work, "...is an enormous photograph and clearly uses its size to establish parallels

with the grand tradition of European painting, suggesting the grandiose and epic " (Clarke 21). What appears curious to Clarke is the banality of the subject matter in the image, an office at night, yet it is the additional components he describes as the not-so-easily-read "iconography and painterly parallels" evident and that most critically, the huge size of the image, combine to bring further meaning to the image (21).



Fig. 18. "Office at Night No 1" - Victor Burgin (1986)
dimensions: 183 x 244 cm

Clarke also argues that when a photograph is enlarged, the viewer experiences a stronger feeling of its transformation and worth (22). I employ similar conventions in my work, recalling the traditions of the large-scale narrative painting. Much inspired by a desire to deliver the viewer similar impressions like those personally gained from the impressive scale of the paintings found at the Louvre, I chose to portray my own photographic tableaux in large scale.

There is something else too. The neoclassical artists exhibited a predilection for more serious subject matter, such as formally acknowledged classical impressions history and religion. This approach brought a sense of the portent and profundity to their work, qualities I seek to subvert and exploit in order to bring these same qualities through the lesser known, personalised idiosyncratic histories visualised in my works.

4.2 Digital montage

“Within these fabricated landscapes, the horizon suggests endless time, the trees demarcate space, and the fragments of snapshots verify an actual lived experience. The reassembled figures, their gestures and expressions, help to create a story that often reflects my own personal dreams and contemplations”. (Lopez 13)



Fig 19: “Heirs Come to Pass, 3” by Martina Lopez (1986)

A montage like a painting or drawing is *made* and a photograph *taken*. In discussing the principal aesthetic forms of pictorial media, Jonathan Friday proposes the use of collage falls into a category of a “manugraphy”, alongside paintings, drawings, and engravings, that contrast as manufactured images with that of the taken photograph (Friday 39). Friday points to the creation of photographs as being “casually dependant on the world they depict”; by comparison the manugraph differs due to an intentional relation to the world premeditated through the philosophies, opinions and proficiency of the manugrapher (39); his intention is to express the fundamental differences between chance and more calculated modes of representation of subject matter.

It is not Friday's intention to denigrate. Here he readily acknowledges the skill and intention required to take a photograph, rather he is highlighting the term *casualness* to suggest theoretical differences in the way we critique photographs and speak

of other forms of manufactured pictorial media (39). The tableau works created for this project are digital montage constructions.

Martina Lopez is a pioneering digital artist who began creating computer generated allegorical photo-montage following the death of her father, as a “way of reconstructing memories and exploring feelings of loss and change” (Hesse). Scanned selections from old black and white photographic portraits of her past and present relatives are selected then clear-cut out of their original settings only to be installed into dreamlike surreal landscapes. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Lopez's use of the computer to creatively assist with art work was considered ground-breaking. When one observes comparatively the digital manipulation and post-production abilities of today's modern computer Lopez's montage technique appears almost analogue.

Whilst inspired by both her motivations and technical process I employ conceptual similarities and differences within my project. Although Lopez's work is conceptually emotive and visually appealing I consider the mix of monochromatic figures, wildly fragmented application of scenery and deeply saturated colour background panoramas makes apparent a disconnect between the characters and the landscape in which they find themselves.

I seek to remedy the visual disengagement I see apparent between character and landscape through using an intrinsically different visual approach. This is not the only difference of note. Lopez rationalises that her digitally manipulated works reflect issues of her personal identity, of her culture and importantly, how she sees herself (Lopez). Conversely, my works are based upon historical, mythological and legendary characters and events that are relevant to others. Lopez describes her ambiguous fabricated horizons as suggesting

endless time as her images are intended to reflect dreams, with no obvious start or finish. Within my works, horizons make up part of a specific and deliberately recognisable landscape in order to define place.

It appears Lopez adheres to a foreground, middle ground and background format through most of her montage work. I sought to exclude foregrounds quite deliberately, in order to prompt the viewer to focus first on the principal characters and the story they re-enact. This I did so as to offer a reflection upon how the story itself was revealed to me through being narrated from the point of the principal characters. Lopez's works were based upon a stated desire to document, although I would argue she re-documents, her family history in a manner that was well beyond the intention of the simple poses that were evident in the early photographs.

My images differ further. I maintained an intention to demonstrate a distinctive perspective of the characters, props and scenery. This perspective component is incorporated to provide the impression that what is seen is on a stage directly in front of the viewer. The outcome is a view as though looking slightly upward at the scene, as though one is seated amongst a theatre or cinema audience.

Lopez makes use of varying scale to provide a pseudo-accurate juxtaposition of her primary characters with background secondary figures and objects through paying attention to appropriate size, proximity, spacing and distance within expansive landscapes. Everything she includes appears to have its considered place and, more importantly, its own space. The factors of composition and scale are fundamental components of my work as well. Raw as they may appear today, Lopez's work appears as beautifully as evocative allegorical montage tableau.

The distant landscapes evidenced in my works are distinctive representations of actual small town backdrops. The landscapes appear just as they do in reality as the visible horizons of the landscape. They are no doubt similar also to the way they must have appeared to residents in the town from previous times.

Always there and ever present, these are the backdrops to every day life consigned to the local subconscious, there but seemingly unnoticed day in and day out. They remain as a constant, changing little over time. Only a visitor to the place appears to consciously notice these horizons as something new and different, and only if they are perceptive enough to look and be interested. In presenting these horizons in the works, local residents may indeed recognise a sense of place immediately.

My decision to digitally capture and construct illustrations for my project was borne of a desire to combine conceptual preparation with technical proficiency. What was to be illustrated had to appropriately portray something of and from the respective story it represented. The selection of a moment from the story that was distinctively suitable without the result appearing too obscure or ambiguous was critical.

As I looked to illustrate a particular singular moment from each history, myth or legendary event, it also was important the image reflect that moment with some degree of clarity. To this end I believe I have been successful; although I recognise the images will, for some, require a further form of outside clarification.

4.3 Aesthetics: Conventions and Visual Language

The aesthetics employed in the project works are not only inspired by the neoclassical painting genres. The images are intended to read as pictorial narratives and thus it is important they reflect a consistent expressive style, a similar visual language. Inspiration for visual language is drawn from the conventions found in historical narrative painting and the political propaganda posters and billboards from the twentieth century. Such artwork was often character-focused and expressed meanings designed to inform, educate and influence public opinion.

Propaganda imagery was used to cognitively connect the viewer with the icons of heroism, patriotism and leadership, and also detrimentally, to malign and slander others considered out of favour. Through propaganda, melodrama surfaced as a the narrative form. Propagandists long realised the influence

that could be rendered over the human cognitive bias in order to manipulate the notion of stereotype. Propaganda imagery was intended to reinforce subliminally as much as express the message. I seek to employ similar techniques, playing on the notion of heroic characters and underlying messages in order to provoke the viewer to go beyond the obvious staged two-dimensional scenarios playing out before them.

The messages of propaganda were simple and ominously subconsciously powerful. Joseph Stalin gloriously applauding the heroic workers of the Soviet Union; or the top hatted, goatee-bearded, the finger pointing of Uncle Sam; or a beaming Chairman Mao congratulating the revolutionary deeds of his Peoples Republic. Not all propaganda images were portraits celebrating the cult of personality, for example, of the illustrated faces of post-war communism and the patriotic fervour expressed by militia of the Peoples Liberation Army.



Fig. 20: "Let's raise the generation utterly devoted to the cause of communism!"
Viktor Ivanov, (1947) - Soviet-era propaganda poster



Fig. 21: 'Field Training Will Make Our Red Heart Follow Chairman Mao Forever' (1971)
artist unknown

It is suggested that the principal application of propaganda artwork was to alter or contrive previously recognised history (Galikowski). I acknowledge that through illustrating small town histories myth and legend, my works are evidence of a similar form of re-staging of the past. However, it is not the socially manipulating messages found in propaganda posters that I seek to employ. Rather the linking is found through emulating the consistent semiotics evident in propaganda posters. It is these semiotics employed by propaganda illustrators as expressed through the main characters, facial expressions, gesticulations and, importantly, their pose evident that motivated the direction of the characters seen in my work.

Soviet and Chinese communist propaganda posters were often designed with specific illustrative characteristics in mind, those principally being “the compositional centrality of human figures, bold images, and simple, direct slogans”

(Galikowski). Through my works I particularly wanted to explore visually the characters’ melodramatic, exaggerated pose, to emphasise and express a sense of heroism in the characters central to each narrative.

There is also the deliberately overplayed ‘off-stage’ gazes of the main characters, as if they’re distracted by a greater purpose and the viewer should follow suit. The images reflect a single story and, as with any story, there are heroes. It is the heroes off-stage observation and apparently deliberate disengagement with the viewer that I sought to emulate. It is reminiscent of cinematic character representations where characters for the most part do not look at the camera. The disengagement I see as intentional as the characters in the posters appear as if they are busy, distracted and have something else perhaps more important and pressing in mind. It is symbolic that they have much more important tasks at hand.



Fig. 22: *Breaking Home Ties* – Norman Rockwell (1954)

The choice of subject matter for my project works is also founded upon the small town vernacular with intentional

overt and underlying messages. The works draw upon stereotypical portrayals of the everyday and ordinary subject matter; subject matter that has an unmistakeable Norman Rockwell-like modality to it, a language of sentimentalised visions of times-gone-by. This is by no means by accident as I have drawn upon similar themes of sentimentality and stereotype critics and viewers alike find in Rockwell's work.

Rockwell optimistically envisaged around him a friendly, honest, conscientious society of hard-working citizens whose lives were just as busy and eventful as any celebrity and considered that theirs were stories that should be retold through his work (Finch 5). Critics, however, have often not favoured Rockwell's overtly optimistic colourful reinterpretations of the ordinary, with many suggesting his works too often over-simplify and do nothing but distort reality, somewhat like propaganda (5). Yet Rockwell's images remain quintessentially, albeit stereotypically, nostalgic,

popular exemplifications of American society. Rockwell fashioned metaphorical illustrations of everyday life that included elements that appear familiar to those of us from western cultures, yet were his and his alone (7). My works look to express similar themes found in the towns and communities of the Kaipara Region except through using photographic means as the medium. As seen in Rockwell's work, the aesthetic employed is deliberately intended to challenge the grander traditions of the historical narrative painting and reposition it photographically to portray well-known and lesser known histories of small town.

Through my work there are also measured suggestions of a Gregory Crewdson melancholy. Crewdson's talent and ability to regularly create staged photographic tableaux on a grand scale in terms of both on-location production sets and the resulting end product, is matched by the huge prices his images subsequently command in the art market. Crewdson's

external scenes are often photographed in and around small towns; a factor that visually evokes isolation, melancholy and remoteness. Crewdson's works reveal "the tension between order and disorder, reality and fantasy, beauty and shame" (Stauble 163). His single point perspective for the camera's viewpoint everything constructed: actors, clothing, props, lighting, palette, very much like a film set but for only one shot. All for a peripeteias in the drama.



Fig.23: "Untitled, Summer 2004" - Gregory Crewdson (2004)



Fig. 24: "The Last Cannibal Supper" – Greg Semu (2010)

The work of Auckland-born contemporary Pasifika artist, Greg Semu, also offered inspiration through his carefully conceived digitally manipulated tableaux. His work serves to reflect upon the societal impact of cultural displacement and colonisation on native populations (Semu). Within his recent multiple image series, *The Last Cannibal Supper*, Semu himself plays the central part of a latter-day Jesus of the South Pacific.

The imagery symbolically expresses a melancholy as local islanders prepare their last feast before Christianity "saves and paralyses" them (Kilgallon). For this series, Semu photographs numerous images of characters, objects and backgrounds separately, each forming as separate layer to the image. Semu then combines the layers together in post-production to form single grand tableau. That Semu attaches himself

to conventions of the historical narrative paintings is most obvious. His reworked reinterpretations of High Renaissance painting through digitally manipulated photographic means revealed potential opportunities through subverting historical narrative paintings. This process is similar in terms of technicality and production methodology to that employed for my own works.

My work follows similar principals in terms of employing the conventions of history and seeks to express the same visual language of the historical narrative painting. Where I chose to differ from other practitioners lies in the decision to consciously work with *both* the well-known *and* the less well-known histories, as presented by local people. Which form of known history, I wanted the locals to decide.

The human psychoanalytical emotion of stereotype is driven by mental behaviour that can be manipulated by providing

artificial stimulus in seeking to induce certain responses from the audience (Narayanaswami). Conversely, stereotype in itself is not something that is singularly immoral or symptomatic of some corrupt attitude or behaviour. To stereotype is an inherently rational human reaction that we appear to cognitively apply when not made aware of all the facts related to information we receive. Using our imagination, we subliminally 'fill in the gaps' in order to complete a scene; this is to stereotype and we do it based upon our memory, life experience and understanding.

Ultimately, my role is that of a visual translator through a conceptual reinterpretation of local people's revelations. Through application of signifiers that can be identified with the archetypal New Zealand small town society, and through drawing on my own memory and cognitive recall, I to strive to make up the components evidenced in the works.

Through this reinterpreting of oral recollections of small town revelations, a cognitive representation takes place. My imagination comes into play, working to complete the story in my mind's eye. What is not mentioned in the course of the story telling, is no less implied. To fill in these *gaps* I am consciously playing upon the notions of stereotype, sentimentality, and nostalgia, even cliché, to construct and consolidate the allegory evidenced within the images. By doing this I aim to build suspense, to increase the layering of the underlying narrative, and to build upon the critical moments to understand from each respective rendered revelation.

Each of the works created for this project evidences a very separate story. Each represents a place, an event and characters involved in it from the past, a reinterpretation of a history. At first glance the narratives may appear as photographic re-enactments of an event of some kind. Yet,

there is something further that imposes itself on the eye of the viewer – something that might not appear correct, not quite perfect, potentially even visually disturbing. Foregrounds do not appear, colours are muted and marginally desaturated, principal characters consistently appear in three-quarter view, horizons and backgrounds and skies appear in focus as sharp as the characters themselves. These are the visual characteristics I have chosen to employ. This is my challenge, to deliberately initiate cognitive perceptions of stereotype, sentimentalism and nostalgia for the viewer.

4.4 Production & technical processes

In terms of technical and practical application, I approach each work as if it is a commercial photographic production. Initial experience quickly made apparent the need to establish a structured methodology that would be useful to completing

image manufacture. These productions are completed progressively and technically with capture, post-production, print and mounting undertaken through all means digital over a period of four to five weeks. From actors to props to backgrounds, everyone and everything is shot separately and then manipulated together in many separate layers through Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop. Through being influenced by the theatrical cinematic production concept of *mise-en-scène*, I was able to better manage the numerous production elements necessary. The distinctive principal features of the *mise-en-scène* creative production plan process are set out as follows:

set design – includes props; background

lighting – natural; daylight; soft; harsh; shadow; mood

space – content; proximity; size of characters and objects

composition – symmetry; organisation; location; balance

costume – character; date; age; time; period; event; place

make up and hair styling – as with ‘costume’

actors – stereotyped; classical; stage; melodramatic; natural

film stock – digital capture and choice of output

aspect ratio – working to fill the aspect frame with the story.

Mise-en-scène is a predetermined and pragmatic working practice useful for a film or stage director, helpful in that it expediently expresses their working concept and determines a specific quality through their work (Yale). Through planning each aspect of the production from the point of “what is to be seen” (translation), I was able to propose and maintain an appropriate approach towards image construction. The extent to which each feature contributed to the production is outlined in finer detail as follows:

Set design shooting is a relatively straightforward and technically consistent exercise as the ‘set’ itself is for the most part created within the digital darkroom on computer.

The photography for the project takes place in many varied locations: in various studios, at my own home, inside people's lounge areas or their garages, and in and around Auckland and the Kaipara Region when shooting locations. When planning a backdrop photograph, and character actor for that matter, it has been essential to consider and plan for the possible issues likely to impact each location and ensure that suitable equipment required to complete the shoot is at hand. Each character actor is photographed against a white backdrop screen to allow for an accurate selection through clear-cutting in post-production. Props were photographed independently in a separate photo-shoot. Backgrounds including skies, landscapes and horizons were photographed on-location in, near or around the small town in which the particular story being illustrated was set.

Lighting of the character actors was a critical in order to appropriately replicate conditions captured in the

backgrounds, skies or some other used object in the image. I utilised a two light, white and silver umbrella reflector combination, the silver light acting as the key light in imitating the direction of sunlight. This for the most part worked well, although ensuring the actor or object was illuminated with the key light on the correct side was something to watch. An example of this is found in the Kaukapakapa c. 1895 work, where bright directional sunlight on the horses required high contrast replicated sunlighting on all the characters and a well-lit blue sky background.

Space was a luxury I intended at the outset of production through the deliberate and consistent application of a very wide aspect ratio. The size of the tableau 'canvas' allowed for a thorough exploration of scale and size of all the components before completing the image. Where characters and / or objects required some form of relationship or interaction, the allowance for space meant that I could accommodate a wide

degree of placement consideration. The careful application of space between characters was one way to add the feeling of tension to an image, as is found in the Helensville c. 1865, where maintaining a distance between each character was intended to reflect the emotional separation of characters in reality.

Composition was paramount and intended as the primary technique in which to best depict the chosen moment forming each story. The wide panoramic nature of the works allowed for considerable scope for toying with ideas in symmetry and composition modification. For montage work composition became fundamental to visualising the narrative as intended as the component layers are brought together in post-production and applied to the 'canvas'. In the work *Parakai* c. 1965, the backdrop design is that of an interior and choices for composition, while obviously different from those of an exterior found in other images, are surprisingly limited.

Costume along with *make-up and hair styling* are critical to each image as these are the most visibly obvious signifiers available for setting a certain period piece within a certain time frame. The differences apparent between Helensville c. 1865 and South Head c. 1970 are obvious comparisons as the characters are clearly located within different periods primarily because of what they wear and their hair styles. It is not background landscape that determines *when* each story is set, rather it is the outward physical appearance of the characters, props and buildings that reinforce impressions of a specific period in time.

Actors can make or break a production and also the outcome. Working with actors is potentially a tenuous and difficult phase in any production. Through the production phase I worked with over forty different actors, all of whom were volunteers, some with previous acting experience and others posing for the first time in front of a camera. Experience suggested good

forward planning when it came to involving actors on the shoot and providing them with assertive direction to ensure the best results. I had to ensure I had complete control in order to expedite the many different photo-shoots required. An example of successful actor management is evidenced through the gentleman rider seen in *Kaukapakapa c. 1895*. The actor playing the part had not ridden a horse for over sixty years and was quite fearful of doing so again at seventy years of age. As the images are composites the issue was resolved simply by directing him to sit on a real saddle affixed to a wooden saw horse and then later superimposing him on the beast.

'Film stock' is a feature of mise-en-scène that a cinematic or film director might usually employ to ensure a consistency of identical film quality was being used for a particular film-making production. Any variation may result in unflattering changes to colour, grade, grain and exposure when rendered

and viewed later. However, 'film stock' appears less of a concern in terms of today's digital production process. It could be considered laterally to reflect upon camera and lens choice for image capture and output format required to complete post-production.

Aspect ratio in terms of the projects works is the most outwardly obvious component of my image production process. Each image exhibits an aspect ratio with an exaggerated emphasis on width for three fundamental reasons: firstly, as a play on representing the landscapes in which one finds the small towns and communities on which this project focuses upon; secondly, the extreme width is intended to evoke impressions of viewing a wide format cinema screening or performance theatre staging; and thirdly, as the works are each a fabricated montage, it became important for me to signify that in an overt manner.

Conclusion

This investigation was one that set out to discover what lay beyond the often idealised, often romanticised, outside perceptions of small town life and to discover how local people might relate their sense of place. Research has suggested the narratives for recollected folklore that surrounds local history, myth and legend arise from a strong sense of pride on the part of the specific community to which they refer.

By immersing myself in an exploration of the small towns and communities of the Kaipara Region, I looked to uncover ways in which residents might express their sense of place, not only through the formal history of the place but also through the 'little histories' that are just as important to them. I hoped to discover just how they might reference local folklore they see as exemplifying local identity, and then through implementing a clearly defined collaboration methodology to work with these locals, to investigate ways to illustrate

their stories photographically. Meetings were held with many Kaipara residents throughout the course of the projects exploration. By far the majority of the interaction employed with locals proved thoroughly successful. During the course of mutual discussions, they were encouraged to reveal the histories, myths, and legends specifically connected to the places in which they lived. I saw it as entirely appropriate that the locals decided what was an appropriate reference to local history.

The outcome of these discussions often highlighted something unexpected. The locals did not always choose to differentiate between the conventional, officially recorded histories and unique, personalised idiosyncratic recollections, folk stories and folklore. They appeared to see these versions of history as equally important. My role as artist was to reflect that. Through using these folk stories, I am critiquing history itself.

My principal conceptual strategy is to allude to the history of picture making. Conventional history maintains its own language. I chose to challenge and subvert that same language to represent unique lesser-known histories, myths and legends of small towns and remote communities. I am consciously representing the idiosyncratic, quirky and personalised versions of history as a challenge to the conventional history of a particular place. By using these same accepted conventions I am better able to present an alternative kind of history. After all, these 'little histories' are no less real for the people they relate to than the formal officially recognised history of a place.

Just as I am challenging history, through aesthetics I am challenging the notions of pictorial tableaux. I draw on the melodramatic visual characteristics of social realism and propaganda art as a wry and slightly ironic nod toward deliberately 'elevating, aggrandising and making legendary'

the 'little histories' of the Kaipara to sit alongside the formal. The aesthetic choices employed within my works are those drawn from historical narrative paintings, the staged allegorical photograph, and character-focused propaganda style graphic illustrations. Art historical references deliberately alluded to in this project assert the 'little histories' as wilfully obstinate challengers to their mainstream counterparts.

What can be seen in each of my works is based upon a 'true story', actual events now part of history. Some have taken on the mantle of local myth and even legend. Using their imagination the storytellers naturally embellish the truth in order to create and maintain interest for their audience. In reinterpreting the stories a further layer of embellishment occurs as the narratives fall prey to my own imagination. I see my works adding to local revelations, and the reactions of those locals who have seen them appears to reflect this.

Also found in each work is a seemingly unavoidable consequence of two degrees of embellishment. As such, do these images each portray a fabrication? Is what we see now a lie? How does embellishment affect the truth. Does the truth become a victim because of embellishment? The answer to these questions is perhaps best found by considering the manner in which stories of history, myth and legend are recorded or retold.

This project explored notions of collaboration with the residents of small towns and communities to create staged imagery with which they might identify, that might help define for them a sense of place. I looked to establish a form of collaboration, a process in which each local engaged during this phase of the project could work with me to develop illustrative subject matter and ways in which this could be done. I consider this project's research question may be answered positively, particularly if such an exercise

is approached with appropriate conceptual preparation in mind. This project could readily expand to encapsulate and collaborate with a wider audience.

The works reflect the tangible outcome of this investigation. They act as the visual artefacts of an extensive research investigation. They were constructed not only to present an allegorical rendering of small town history, myth or legend, but also to challenge, to raise questions, to provoke the viewer's imagination, just as an outsider looking in.

Yet this project taught me more about my own attitudes towards defining and having a local identity, than the attitudes of those whom I chose to investigate. The involvement of other people, the locals, ultimately became a conduit for questioning, for challenging and redefining my own emotions and thus helped me develop a better understanding of the importance of having a sense of place.

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Helensville c. 1865



Helensville c. 1959



South Head c. 1970



Kaukapakapa c. 1895



Parakai c. 1965



Pouto Point c. 2012



Baylys Beach c. 2008

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The plates illustrated herein are reproductions of the final works submitted as partial requirement for this Masters of Design by Project, and were exhibited at NorthArt Gallery in Northcote, Auckland.

The original works were formally presented at the final examination workshop that took place on Wednesday, 27th February 2013, and was held in conjunction with the public exhibition between the dates of 24th February and 13th March 2013.

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Appendices

Photographer seeking locals for art photography project

North Shore based photographer David Austin is looking for local groups to take part in a photo-art project as part of his Masters degree in design.

Titled 'Small Town Revelations', David's project is a nation-wide one; he will travel throughout New Zealand photographing groups in around 15 towns, with the intention of ending up with 12 superb photos which will go on exhibition in Auckland.

He is looking to work alongside residents and locally-based dramatic, performance, and community groups from Helensville or nearby Kaipara communities in an effort to portray the local histories, myths and/or legends that represent each area he visits.

He intends to work collaboratively with the groups to work out what best represents the towns.

David became a professional photographer in 2005 after 18 years in commercial fire and life insurance, and now runs Island Bay Photography, focusing on advertising, editorial, illustrative and portrait photography.

He had been a keen hobby photographer, and when his accountant wife went back to work full time that gave the opportunity to work at what he was passionate about.

David's photographs are works of art, and he is heavily influenced by a number of internationally-acclaimed photographers.

After turning professional he undertook a two-year Diploma in Contemporary Photography at Unitec in Auckland, which he completed in 2007. He then spent two years working for a medium-format camera rental business before continuing his education with a Bachelor in Design and Visual Studies



• David Austin

- Photography (BDVA) degree, which he received in April this year.

Now, he's taking that one step further to gain a Masters in Design, majoring in photography, which will take him an extra 18 months to two years to complete.

The photo art project is a major part of the degree, and he will be judged on the final public exhibition.

Any local or local group interested in taking part in 'Small Town Revelations' should phone David on 027 416 7920 or email islandbay@orcon.net.nz.

Future of Kaurakapapa village discussed

*Appendix 1: Article appearing in the Helensville News newspaper
page 6, August 2011 issue.*

Local histories feature in photography project



• 'Helensville c1865', one of two Helensville-based images in David's exhibition

Locals – and locales – from Helensville, Parakai, South Head and Kaukapakapa feature in a photography exhibition currently showing in Northcote as the culmination of North Shore photographer David Austin's Masters in Design degree.

Called 'Small Town Revelations', the exhibition is billed as "a dramatised photographic retelling of small town histories, myths and legends." It's on at the NorthArt gallery in Norman King Square, Ernie Mays Street, Northcote from 10am - 4pm until March 13.

David has spent the past 18 months travelling the Kaipara region, developing seven different Kaipara stories as revealed by the locals he met along the way.

The result is seven large scale tableaux – photographs 1.8m wide by 50cm high – which reflect a local history, myth or legend and came about through a creative collaboration and contribution with Kaipara locals. Helensville is represented twice, along with Parakai, South Head, Kaukapakapa, Pouto Point, and Baylys Beach.

"During the course of the project I met with many Kaipara locals, from Baylys Beach in the north to Woodhill in the south and all points in between, most of whom revealed to me a myriad of fascinating local histories that for them represent a local

identity," says David.

"Some of these histories were the formal and well known, and some others were events of the past that are perhaps to be considered more quirky, personal and idiosyncratic. Yet all were related to me as being just as important as the next story – and therein lies the most fascinating thing about this project.

"It was the local residents themselves who as the storytellers did not differentiate between the formal and the idiosyncratic; the big and the 'little' histories, as I called them, were the same.

"I chose to illustrate a select number of those revelations."

After deciding on which story and what part of it to illustrate, the construction of the images – in reality works of art – each took five to six weeks to create.

The process involved multiple photo-shoots, with each character, prop, sky and background photographed at separate times. They were then carefully layered up digitally to make an image that reflected the particular story

being told.

"I utilised a mix of locals and volunteer actors to play the characters in the works," says David. "It was a complicated and drawn out process, but a lot of fun to make. I met and worked with a lot of people to make each

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• David Austin

Helensville CAB is at 27 Commercial Road, phone 420 7162.

Photography project (cont)

• From page 4

image happen."

"I intend to carry on and develop work for the Small Town Revelations project (beyond the Masters course) as personal work in due course, as I find local histories a thoroughly absorbing subject. The Kaipara is so incredibly rich in its history – both in terms of the big and the 'little' histories, from the long past to the more recent."

The 'hyper-extended', exaggerated landscape format of the finished photographs was deliberately chosen says David as it plays on the themes of the unreality of photographs representing history and also importantly small towns being found in actual landscapes – the

sorts of things David had to consider and discuss theoretically through the Masters degree side of his work.

With final image file sizes a gigantic 2GB each – about 500 times the size of a normal digital camera image – David says his works could easily be blown up to billboard size.

"I had thought about doing this around



• A small portion of 'Helensville c1865', showing Helensville locals Robin and Margaret Truman, both regular re-enactors playing the parts of Helensville co-founder Isaac McLeod & Mrs James Hand

the Kaipara and might still experiment with doing this at some stage in the future," he says.

David became a professional photographer in 2005, and now runs Island Bay Photography, focusing on advertising, editorial, illustrative and portrait photography.

WHEN IT COMES TO YOUR BIGGEST ASSET

David Austin

Small Town Revelations

A dramatised photographic retelling
of small town histories, myths and legend

25th February to 13th March 2013

NorthArt.

Norman King Square
Ernie Mays Street, Northcote, Auckland



"All places exist somewhere between the inside and outside views of them, the ways in which compare to, and contrast with, other places"

Lucy Lippard, The Lure of the Local: senses of place in a multicentered society (1997)

The photographic works created for this exhibition reflect Lucy Lippard's insightful sentiments through portrayals of principal moments from a select number of histories, myth and legends as revealed by residents of small towns. Through my exploration for this project I have found local people would often not differentiate between official recorded histories and lesser-known, quirky, personal recollections of the past. I found this fascinating. I wanted to explore possible ways in which to potentially illustrate these "little histories" that residents of small towns might consider reinforce their local identity just as much as the big histories.

Intended as an ongoing body of work that could encompass many small towns from all parts of Aotearoa New Zealand, these exhibited works reveal a sample of histories, myth and legends as suggested by people of the towns and communities located around the Kaipara Region.

Each work is entirely digitally constructed; made up of multiple, composited images, they are designed as components that to come together like chapters in a novel. Each element is sourced, prepared and photographed separately then synthesised into a whole, to build up a story-telling tableau.

David Austin
February 2013

*Appendix 3: Explanatory catalogue as produced to accompany the NorthArt Gallery exhibition.
This leaflet was produced as a multi-page, A5 sized, hard copy storytelling document and was made available for the benefit of both the project examiners and general viewing public.*

Helensville c. 1865

482mm x 1800mm

Setting out on this amazing journey two years ago, I sought to find those citizens of small towns who maintain a knowledge of their local history. Through developing interaction with local residents, I was eventually introduced to the Helensville & Districts Historical Society, a body dedicated to preserving this Kaipara town's colonial settler history, a history that is researched, recorded and recollected in great detail. Through many conversations with Society members and other Helensville personalities and historians, a picture began to develop of how local people identify with and explain their past.

Helensville derives its name from the large kauri villa built on the banks of the Kaipara River by one of the town's founding fathers, John McLeod, in order to entice his ever-loyal wife, Helen, to make the move from Nova Scotia to rural New Zealand. The story of 'Long John' McLeod has become lore for those in the southern Kaipara, as he, along with his brother Isaac, established cordial relations with local Ngāti Whātua people and began the first timber milling business employing Maori and European settlers.

For this image, I worked with Society members in developing and visualising a story of the founding family of Helensville. It is a portrayal of family matriarch, Helen McLeod, and other members of the first European settler family, watching apprehensively as storm clouds approach, wondering what further challenges this untamed new land will bring.

South Head c. 1970

482mm x 1800mm

I met Cedric McLeod on his farm at remote South Head, which is more of a close-knit rural community than an actual small town. However, there is no doubt the local residents know each other as well as any residents of a small town. During our conversations, Cedric related several stories about the South Head but again one revelation stood out – a story that many in the area still recall.

The story reflected the country's social and industrial upheaval at the time, but it was the duration of the event that really cemented it in the minds of locals. What happened was akin to something of a Mexican standoff ... albeit an incredibly short-lived one! In fact, possibly one of this country's briefest industrial actions took place on the rolling hills of the Kaipara's South Head in the summer of 1970.

Members of a local hay-baling gang contracting in the South Head farming area decided they would start strike action to underline their demand for more pay. The local farmer on whose land they chose to make their stand would have none of it, and aggressively 'invited them to leave' his property if they would not work. There was little resolve within the ranks of the inexperienced strikers. Within minutes the disappointed team had returned to work, the only residual effect being the memory of how short it all lasted! This work represents the opening (and closing) of the great South Head strike negotiation talks.

Baylys Beach c. 2008

482mm x 1800mm

Early in the morning of 7 July 1994, a huge storm hit the North Island's west coast. Winds gusting as high as 150 knots tore at anything in their path. Sailing single-handed from Fiji to Port Taranaki, yacht owner Lyndsay Wright, could do little but hold onto his besieged vessel's rigging as the vicious Tasman seas and fierce winds tore the sails from the 60-foot steel hull, turning the Askoy II into a 40-tonne surf board, heading her straight towards Ripiro Ocean Beach in the northern Kaipara. In pitch darkness, the yacht slewed into the soft sand just 2 kilometres south of the small seaside town of Baylys Beach, spinning sharply round, snapping her masts, and sticking fast.

There the Askoy II remained, becoming something of a local curiosity, as her steel hull deteriorated in her sandy grave, through the tides and the ever-shifting sands. Late in 2007 a Belgian preservation society initiated a salvage investigation. It had come to light that in the mid-1970s the Askoy II had been owned and sailed around the world by famed Belgian actor and singer, Jacques Brel. When the experts had suggested the wreck could be recovered, no expense was spared to free her – they wanted the Askoy II back in Belgium.

I talked about the salvage work with Baylys Beach resident, Raewyn Douglas, co-owner of a forestry logging business in nearby Dargaville. The team from Douglas Logging along with several other local contractors became involved in the difficult recovery operation, a four-day task of digging, excavating, re-excavating and removing the soft sand and debris from the Askoy II before she finally broke free of the Ripiro sands. It seemed like most of the population of Baylys Beach were in attendance. A large crowd of locals and holidaymakers watched as the Askoy II finally began to move again, and a great cheer went up. In January 2008, the largely still intact hull was transported by road to the Port of Tauranga, and placed on a container ship for her unprecedented next voyage and renaissance in Europe.

Pouto Point c. 2012

482mm x 1800mm

On Saturday 10 March 2012, I was invited by several Kaipara locals to attend an event that was described to me as history in the making. Throughout the course of this project I had been seeking out histories, myth and legend that generally related to those events and characters long past. The notion that a 'historic' occurrence was to be revealed while I was in attendance raised a potentially unique perspective for my project that was too good to miss.

I made the long trek to Pouto Point, located at the southern-most tip of the Kaipara northern heads, ready to witness the rare placement of a rahui, a ban or restriction, on the waters and grounds of the Kaipara Harbour. Around 300 people were there, including many representatives from local iwi, Ngāti Whātua, and other concerned Kaipara locals as well as visiting dignitaries, politicians, and some media. They marched as one along Pouto Point beach to a meeting point where they stated their united opposition to the proposed installation of 200 submerged marine power turbines in the mouth of the Kaipara Harbour by Crest Energy with the consent of the Northland Regional Council. The assumed impact on sea life and surrounding ecosystem is still theoretical at this stage but there can be no doubt there will be significant impact on the seabed and fish stocks. I feel great empathy for the locals whose lifestyles and environment will be affected.

As I arrived at Pouto, I was particularly struck by the powerful vision of contemporary New Zealand cultural protest. Three horse riders charged onto the beach carrying Tino-Rangatiratanga and the United Tribes of New Zealand flags. This work reflects these riders of protest and is dedicated to those who proactively seek to protect the Kaipara.

Parakai c. 1965

482mm x 1800mm

I spoke with Dianne McLeod (née Pengelly) about her life growing up around tourists in the small southern Kaipara town of Parakai. The Pengelly family had owned Hinemoa House, a boarding hotel that provided accommodation for visitors calling to bathe in Parakai's famous hot springs from 1920 until its destruction by fire in 1977.

Among other chores, the Pengelly children were expected to help out both in the dining room and at the reception. An incident occurred when Dianne was around 12 years of age has stuck in her mind ever since. One night, after dinner the Pengelly family was relaxing watching the recently introduced television, when the front reception bell rang. Her father said, "That'll be for you, Dianne". She headed out to reception. An older gentleman greeted her (he seemed very elderly to her at the time), standing there stark naked and stating that he couldn't find his room. Not sure who was the more embarrassed, Dianne made a very quick exit to call her father, who moved with great speed, grabbing a towel to wrap around the poor old chap.

It was the first time in all her family's experience that anyone had come to the front desk completely naked! They did have a good laugh after though. The guest had been for a plunge bath where bathing costumes were not worn, situated just a very short walk from his room. Unfortunately he became disoriented and wound up at reception, which, as Dianne said, "was probably a good thing".

Kaukapakapa c. 1895

482mm x 1800mm

The little town of Kaukapakapa has a long history and was one of the first European settlements of the Kaipara. Life was extremely difficult and the first settlers only survived the first years in the remote outpost with the help of local Maori. As with many towns of the Kaipara, some of the descendants of these first settler families still live in or near the town.

I met with a local resident by the name of Bernie Marceau. At one stage during our discussions, Bernie showed me an album containing series of historical photographs documenting the early years of European settlement at Kaukapakapa (the place had existed as a settlement for Maori for at least 400 years before any Pākehā arrived). It was a quite an incredible record of the times. One photograph, in particular, fascinated me, as it epitomised the story of a late 19th Century small town in colonial New Zealand. The appearance of these early settlers in their classic English finery among the bush and the primordial landscape appeared to me so out of place for such a remote and distant outpost of the British Empire. The mix of commercial and residential buildings formed an early example of typically patched-together rural, colonial architecture.

Inspired by this historic picture, my representation represents a wider view of the story of that day. It is a portrayal of the first storeowner, Mr Frank Dye, his family and staff, and the travelling photographer who would have taken the picture. The assembly assume their respective poses as directed by the photographer with his field camera. Included in the work is the remaining dwelling section of the original store, as it still stands today, occupied by Bernie Marceau and his family.

Helensville c. 1959

482mm x 1800mm

Many people I met suggested I talk to Greg Smith. When I eventually met up with Greg he presented a somewhat intimidating figure. As I got talking with him, however, I became impressed by his deep knowledge of the Kaipara, of its Maori and European histories, and his legendary capacity for story-telling. Each meeting we had lasted for hours. One story Greg told was so unusual it stood out above all others for me.

This was Greg's recollection of a story his father had told him. One day, in the late 1950s a local personality walked in to his father's automobile workshop in Helensville with a motorcycle motor attached to his back, a steel shaft in one hand, and an aircraft propeller in the other. He wanted to put these bits together so he could build a unique helicopter-like flying machine. Needless to say, what followed was a healthy discussion about the potential safety hazards if the request was carried out. The man left eventually, after realising that no-one was going to help him. Over time this story has become somewhat of a local myth, recalled once in a while at the pub, in the smoko room or at local social events.

In checking on the story with other sources, I am told the man was well known for his elaborate practical jokes. Interestingly, however, another source I spoke to later stated he most likely would have been absolutely serious about his proposal and it was probably no joke, rather an eccentric scheme to get out to the Kaipara Harbour shellfish grounds without getting his feet wet. This work represents the moment the request to build the flying machine is denied.

All inquiries during this exhibition to be made to:

Wendy Harsant
Manager

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