

# INFE LTRA TION S II

F4 COLLECTIVE

BRIT BUNKLEY

JOHANNA PEGLER

ANDREA GARDNER

KARIN STRACHAN

CHRISTINE HELLYAR



WHEN AN OBJECT IS REMOVED from its historical context and placed within a museum, the explicit and singular story in which the artefact was formerly imbedded can be lost or compromised.

The process is transformative, for while the object may lose its unique history on entering a museum exhibition, it generates infinitely more stories in the imaginations of the museum visitor.

The Infiltrations II project builds on this idea, favouring the notion of the Wunderkammer (Cabinet of Curiosities) as a collection of objects intended to generate wonder and speculation. The purpose of the exhibition is to engage visitors with object histories, sometimes with deceit and sometimes in earnest, but with a playfulness which extends, interrogates and multiplies the pre-existing stories the Museum already contains.

There is an intended element of surprise and deception within the project. While some works may be obvious, others are more subtly integrated within the Museum, so visitors have to differentiate between the art works and the existing exhibitions.

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**Libby Sharpe**

Curator Cultural History

Whanganui Regional Museum

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**Andrea du Chatenier**



JOHANNA  
PEGLER  
LITTLE PICTURE,  
BIG PICTURE

AS A CHILD JOHANNA PEGLER remembers standing on a box in the Auckland War Memorial Museum and peering into a diorama and observing an encounter between a woolly mammoth and a human, all taking place in a miniature ice age world. It is perhaps this early memory that led Pegler to make her infiltration into three cubby-holes located in an interactive display for children entitled 'Instant Communication'. Pegler's practice as a painter is primarily focused on landscapes; these are unpeopled and occupied only by animals. For this project she provides us with a tele-portal into another world. The cupboard titled 'Craw' features two moa running across a ridge that resembles the one where Pegler found the stones featured in the diorama. Found in the clay, it has been suggested to her that these could be moa crop or gizzard stones but they are in fact tiny samples of carnelian, quartz and jasper. Pegler likes the idea of moa in another age possibly picking these off the ground, attracted by their luminosity and seed or berry-like appearance and then them being rediscovered by her, a kind of communication with another age through a language of stones.

In the 'Telling Bone' cupboard a selection of bony artefacts have emerged from the sand dune, two teeth of ruminants and the tiny skull of a hedgehog. So what is it about emulating these discoveries in nature in the tiny cramped quarters of a museum display cubby hole? What Pegler says she wants to do is emulate the sense of wonder and discovery one has when small treasures such



as these are found and also for us to consider how when we place small treasures such as these in a different context, their meaning changes. She says “A museum is a place of reverence and of intriguing juxtapositions. I want to show a reverence for where things belong in connection to the earth, even through paint and diorama bits to create an illusory space. Treasure is beneath us. Living wonders are all around us, including artefacts underfoot, possibly moa-made.”

Pegler’s infiltrations into this display about telephone communication picks up on her fascination with dioramas that are not so commonplace in museum display. Often dioramas were and are about conveying a different time and environment to the current one. Although more of an interactive display, this one which was installed in 1998, could now probably be doubled in size to include many other devices—given the rapid development of communication devices and social media since that time. Pegler picks up on that rapid flow in the final cubbyhole marked ‘Particulars’ which is not a scene to be looked into but a kind of tableau of objects and detritus to be pondered. Kauri gum from the Coromandel alongside chunks of polystyrene which Pegler collects from beaches, a bi-product—packaging for the never ending trail of gadgets with which we surround ourselves and an alarming reminder that we are now just as likely to find the bi-products of consumerism as we are precious stones and bones.

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**Greg Donson**



BRIT  
BUNKLEY  
UNGEZIEFER  
and  
SHED 48



DINNER PARTY FACTOIDS TELL US THAT we are always within three to six feet of feet of a spider and eat countless insects while asleep. These stories, mostly apocryphal, reinforce the notion that we are never alone. The natural world is always around us, unseen but waiting.

Inspired by Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Brit Bunkley's *Ungeziefer* (German for vermin) may seem comically large, but its girth serves multiple purposes in its invasion of the audience's psyche. Franz Kafka, the literary patron saint of all things existential, wrote extensively about alienation, brutality and the surreal. Gregor Samsa, the protagonist of Kafka's most famous work *Metamorphosis*, mysteriously transforms into a large insect. The catalyst for the metamorphosis is never revealed and there is no deus ex machina or magical resolution to the conflict. Samsa lives out the rest of his short life as a 'monstrous vermin'. The uneasy relationship this text builds between reality and fiction and its sense of unexplained doom is the fodder for Bunkley's work. Like Kafka's Samsa, Bunkley's *Ungeziefer* is a specimen of fear and anxiety. The large cockroach is at once menacing and benign. Its impossible size is cause for fear, but it is displayed like the rest of the butterflies and insects in the 'Bug Room' of the Whanganui Regional Museum: on its back, certainly disabled, and seemingly dead.

Bunkley's *Shed 48* depicts a tin shed overflowing with flowers, bubbling blood, colossal insects, and arachnids. The tension between nature and culture is crucial to his work and the unease created



by the gulf between these concepts plays out in this video. Deeply concerned with climate change and the impact humans have on the environment Bunkley's post-apocalyptic landscapes hypothesize a world where flora and fauna reclaim the landscape. By severing the video into quadrants with the window of the model street situated on the ground floor of the museum Bunkley further elucidates the disruption we are causing in the natural world. The storefront also connects *Shed 48* to his *Ungeziefer*. The small drapery shop met Bunkley's technical needs and coincidentally it connects directly to his Kafkaesque inspiration, Kafka's father having run a successful dry goods and haberdashery business in Prague.

Bunkley's interest in the neo-classical sculpture of totalitarian states of Central and Eastern Europe and the menacing qualities of their art informs the way he creates images and objects that reference the dominance of culture over the environment. The nature in these artworks is overwhelming, it pulses and pushes out towards the viewer and threatens our view of human supremacy.

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**Sarah McClintock**





## KARIN STRACHAN SPEAK TO THE WIND

*Light the Candle  
Remember Me  
Leave the Candle  
It is the truth  
Blow the candle out  
You are speaking to the wind*

*Tahuna te kanara  
Maharatua ahau  
Waiho te hanara  
Ko te pono tena  
Puhia te kanara  
E korero ana koe te hau*

THE ABOVE POEM IS THE RESULT OF the artist gathering and assembling phrases from 'New and Complete Manual of Maori Conversation; Containing Phrases and Dialogues on a Variety of Useful and Interesting Topics, Together with a Few General Rules of Grammar and a Comprehensive Vocabulary'. This impressively titled book was written by Mother Mary Joseph Aubert in 1885. Mother Aubert established the Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion at Jerusalem on the Whanganui River in 1892 and carved out a life of radical altruism. The funny and profound 'Manual' highlights her commitment to both Maori and Pakeha peoples.

One of the many astounding things Mother Aubert accomplished was the manufacturing of medicines. Many of these bottles have made their way into the collection of the Whanganui Regional Museum and it was their "aged beauty and mystique" that seduced artist Karin Strachan. Her work *Speak to the Wind* is made of wax and ink and uses Strachan's poem pieced together from the 'Manual'. Strachan combines the poem's candle with the worn bottles produced by Mother Aubert and branded with her very serious face.



The resulting bottles have an opaque toxicity and hint at a possible meaning behind the poem and Mother Aubert's work. Medicine can be painful, it can be poison in the wrong hands, and it takes time and patience to wait for it to do its job. Anyone who has been sick knows that medicine always seems to work far too slowly. Mother Aubert's medicine was literal and figurative, healing bodies and spirits. By creating the 'Manual' she knew that understanding between Maori and Pakeha would take time, care and there would be pain. In writing the book she was lighting a candle, speaking to the wind, and waiting for time and the truth to heal.

Strachan has a history of using her works to correspond with the deceased. In the context of the Whanganui Regional Museum these conversations are happening all of the time; objects that connect profoundly to people and places give contemporary audiences a physical way to connect to the stories from our past. With *Speak to the Wind* Strachan becomes not so much an infiltrator in the museum but a guide. It was essential to the artist that she have the support of the current Sisters of Compassion who attended the opening of the exhibition, and appreciated the artist's deep connection to Mother Aubert and her writing. As Sister Sue Cosgrove, from the current Sisters of Compassion, wrote to Strachan "I love the lines you have chosen (or perhaps they chose you)".

**Sarah McClintock**





## F4 COLLECTIVE THE HOUSE GUEST

*'...Faded photographs  
Reliving memories  
Circling histories...'*  
Mercy Williams, detail of the song  
written for *The House Guest*

A FETISHISED NICHE WITHIN nineteenth century photography is the 'Ghost Mother'. Multiple websites are dedicated to these eerie images where modern eyes consume them as historical oddities. In these portraits babies and small children, clothed in elaborate gowns, are accompanied by mysterious black figures or floating hands. These are the ghosts, mothers who have been covered with cloth or perch behind a chair to support and comfort the child as he or she is photographed. The photographs are bizarre to say the least, but hint at the nature of familial and technological life in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

*The Game* is a reversal of this dynamic but it is equally revealing. Part of the larger intervention by the F4 Collective, this photograph shows a seated woman looking down on a child who is clutching a large toy horse. But the child is blackness. Carefully cropped out of the image the child is presented as a full body silhouette. Removed from context, like many objects displayed in museums, this child becomes an orphan, a stranger.

The concept of family is essential to the work of F4 and the



distinctions between the familial and the guest are blurred in this work. *The House Guest* is a response to the large dolls house displayed at The Whanganui Regional Museum. Donated by Josephine Duncan this object comes from one of the most prestigious and notorious families in Whanganui's history. Josephine was born with a different name, Mackay. Her father, Charles Mackay was Mayor of Whanganui in the early twentieth century. He was a lawyer, art lover, politician and paradox. His secrets and family fell apart on 15 May 1920 when he shot and wounded poet Walter D'Arcy Cresswell. In the aftermath it was revealed that Mackay was gay and had allegedly propositioned the writer. After a time in prison Mackay left New Zealand and was tragically killed during the 3 May 1929 riots in Berlin, Germany.

In the years that followed Mackay Street was renamed, his mayoral portrait was removed, and his name was removed off the Sarjeant Gallery foundation stone. His family, who remained in the city, changed their surname and rejected their familial connection to the convicted criminal. For decades he was completely cut out of the story of Whanganui. Like the child in *The Game* he was a mysterious black mark for the family and the city. Today his name is back on the Sarjeant Gallery foundation stone, his story is told online and in books and his contributions to Whanganui are recognised. He is no longer a stranger, but not quite family. Maybe he is a guest?

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To view more of *The House Guest* visit [www.thehouseguest.me](http://www.thehouseguest.me).

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**Sarah McClintock**





ANDREA  
GARDNER  
*FAR FROM HOME*  
or WHAT DO WE  
DO WITH THE  
GOLDILOCKS  
PRINCIPLE?



THE PRESENCE OF AN ADOLESCENT bear from North America within the context of a replica settler's cottage from 1840s Whanganui seems infinitely less creepy and unlikely than the kind of inhabitant we might expect to encounter in such a museum setting—a faceless mannequin or full body replica in period costume with dead eyes and dressed up in the past. The cottage seems basic to say the least, with its rough sawn timber interior but given the normal environs of its current inhabitant the space seems positively well appointed for a teenage bear. Gardner's placement of the bear in the context of the cabin and the absence of any settlers suggests that there's an elaborate role reversal happening, rather than Goldilocks moving into the bears' place, this bear's moved in, left his waistcoat and reading material on the chair and the humans have left or been evicted. Either way both the bear and the absent settlers are far away from 'home'. However, this bear by no means seems happy and the fact that he's been spending time throwing darts into an image of an idyllic landscape that should be his home, suggests that he is having some serious issues about his place in the world.

The theme of culture vs nature is a recurring one in Gardner's practice and in part this work was inspired by one particularly vivid memory of her childhood in America when a family picnic in the Sierra Mountains was interrupted by a visiting brown bear. The bear caused the picnic to be hastily aborted and packed away, forcing the family to retreat to the safety of their car. Gardner's Mary Poppins-esque floating lamp/table with three bowls, suspended

in the museum's atrium space, references the story of Goldilocks and the three bears and in turn the idea of the Goldilocks principle which is applied to many disciplines where something must fall within a middle ground rather than the extremities. Where the fairytale porridge was either too hot or too cold, in a planetary sense life flourishes only when the temperatures of the earth fall within an optimal range. Climate science warns us against creating an environment that is too hot or too cold through the introduction of manmade pollutants into a world that was 'just right'.

Human and animal co-habitation and our relationship to each other is a theme that has endured in Gardner's work. Within the context of the Museum she has managed to disrupt the conventions of museum display with subtle wit. The replica cottage has gone from a passive to an active display, where a room of inanimate objects has been activated into a strange combination of wunderkammer come zoo reminding us that the stories that surround objects are often more to do with fiction than fact. The American writer Joshua Corey comments "Ours is a virtual world of overlapping simulacra in which the very concept of "nature" is challenged, denatured, filtered and reborn". Gardner's final contribution to the Infiltrations project explores the idea of overlapping simulacra. By introducing a tactile element into the project she includes information about bears—scientific facts, bears as featured in cartoons, storybooks and mythology that can be discovered by children on many tags suspended from red ribbons.

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**Greg Donson**







## CHRISTINE HELLYAR BLACK REEL & WHITE REEL

CHRISTINE HELLYAR'S WORKS *Black Reel* and *White Reel* are a complex blend of both materials and narrative. For many years, and in particular during a residency at Tylee Cottage in Whanganui, Hellyar has been making works inspired in part by the exploratory voyages of Captain James Cook into the Pacific and more widely she creates works that cross disciplines and cultures, combining traditional and contemporary materials.

The origin of these two works can be linked to the tradition of the lei which historically has been given as a symbol of arrival, departure and affection. The two differ greatly in the choice of materials, *Black Reel* is made from dressed flax sourced from the Foxton Museum while Hellyar was artist-in-residence at Tylee Cottage and *White Reel* is made from white wool that is unravelled from jerseys that were bought second hand. The cotton reels that feature belonged to Hellyar's parents—black from her father and the multicoloured from her mother. The reels are linked to her parents own sewing capabilities as well as their personalities. In this respect these two works are a celebration of Hellyar's parents and their lives, while also an acknowledgement of the 'unknown' makers of so many of the objects contained within the Whanganui Regional Museum. Many viewers would have had the experience of dealing with the flood of belongings that surround someone when they pass away. What a person leaves behind can be as profound as a written history or as inconsequential as a cotton reel. However, the thread of narrative

that is encapsulated in a cotton reel found in a family sewing basket can be a trigger for the memory of a piece of clothing that was worn during a happy family occasion. Likewise, the spectrum of coloured thread featured in these works could be representative of a whole wardrobe of clothes long gone.

Like so many taonga in a museum, the status of *Black Reel* and *White Reel* is fluid. Often narratives are known, but for others stories are imagined, embellished, forgotten and rewritten. Hellyar encourages us to consider who these objects were made for, who they may have belonged to and also the context in which they are placed. She has long been interested in museum collections and during her time in Whanganui as artist-in-residence, Hellyar spent a lot of time studying the Whanganui Regional Museum collections, fascinated by how little is known about the provenance of objects and taonga. Although traditionally working in the framework of an art gallery, Hellyar's two reel works are displayed in a transitional space of Whanganui Regional Museum, where the visitor passes through a light filled and classically designed atrium into the more intimate realm of the Museum's Māori Court which is dedicated to the display of taonga.

**Greg Donson**

*Published by Infiltration Artists Collective  
on the occasion of the exhibition Infiltrations II  
at Whanganui Regional Museum  
13 June 2015 – 31 January 2016*

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*Essays by Greg Donson & Sarah McClintock,  
Sarjeant Gallery Whanganui  
Catalogue design by Sarah Maxey  
Printed by Service Print Ltd, Wellington*

*This project has been generously supported  
by Creative Communities, Whanganui Regional  
Museum and The Sarjeant Gallery Whanganui*





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