

In Living Colour

About the artists: a series of firsts and connecting threads

The show also marks a series of additional firsts for the artists. Auckland based [Amanda Billing](#), well known for her acting, will be making her Wellington debut as an artist. Billing's body of three new works, *Phoebe*, *Seline* and *Luna*. Billing's practices, from acting to photography to painting, revolve around the individuality and universality of the human condition, with a focus on the form and experience of women.

Central to her visual arts practice is an expression of sensuality, which finds an outlet through a surreal, expressive painting style that is in dialogue with all depictions of the female form, from the Neolithic to now. The human body has been a powerful symbol for millenia, immediately relatable to everyone across time and space.

These three new works, which can be read as a triptych but stand equally as individuals, mark a significant moment for Billing as an artist, not simply because this is the first time she is showing her painting outside of Auckland. Each work features a central female figure, abstracted into her purest form. Immersed in gestural swathes of rich magenta, emerald and lilac, and punctuated by deliberately subtle black line marks, the supple bodies of each figure advance and retreat simultaneously into the picture plane. While Billing's subject has always been the female nude; a conscious choice which allows her, as a female artist, to reclaim the notion of the artist's gaze, her approach in her large scale paintings has — up until this point — been one of gentle fluidity. Here, Billing commands the surface of the canvas in a newly assertive way.

Billing's figurative abstractions share the gallery space with acclaimed and internationally recognised artist [Nuala Gregory](#), who is represented in New Zealand by Solander Gallery. For the past 25 years, Gregory has maintained a profile as an exhibiting artist predominantly in the medium of painting, but also in printmaking and drawing. Her work has been shown in Ireland, the USA, New Zealand, Mexico, China and Japan.

In recent exhibitions, she has sought a 'return' to the possibilities of colour, surface, collage and drawing in order to renew the force of the material and the aesthetic against predominantly discursive or conceptual approaches. This is not simply a celebration of materiality but an extended play upon its means, and an enquiry into its ongoing possibilities.

In another first, alongside a series of collage works on paper which the artist is well known for, Gregory presents three hand tufted wool rugs. These rugs, while relatively small in scale, are a significant comment on what constitutes high art, further pushing the boundaries of materiality and a recontextualisation of 'craft' as a legitimate visual art practice.

American born, Christchurch based textile artist [Charrette van Eekelen's](#) intricately layered works also employ notions of 'craft', which has traditionally been seen as women's work. van Eekelen enjoys pushing the boundary of textile art, not so much as a seamstress, but weaving the languages and narratives of painting and sculpture together in a distinctive method which plays with materials. She brings paint onto fabrics, embellishing them with freeform embroidery, where stitches become more than mark making, delineating shapes and textures. Materiality plays a vital role, while the stitches symbolise time and movement.

Having trained as a sculptor in the US, where she gained her first BFA, van Eekelen melds the disciplines of sculpting and painting, with a nod to the rich tradition of embroidery. In this layering, van Eekelen's process is intuitive. She intertwines personal and collective experiences, inviting viewers to engage with familiar materials from a fresh perspective. Each piece reveals a nuanced story, blending the histories of textiles with a painterly sense of place that could be real or imagined.

Multidisciplinary artist [Bobbie Gray's](#) *Gallery* works present a different take on materiality and form. Where Billing turns to traditional painting methods and processes to present the female figure from a fresh perspective, and Gergory and van Eekelen turn to malleable, delicate paper and fabric, Gray looks to plywood and power tools.

With a practice spanning, painting, installation, curation, project development and moving image (including the career highlights such as the projection of her video installation, *Digital Garden*, onto the walls of the historic Coventry Cathedral in the UK, as well as at the World Heritage and UNESCO site, The Medina of Tunis in Tunisia), Agoston Cleary wanted to present works that came as close as possible to encapsulating each of these practices in *In Living Colour*. In so doing, the artist is fully present, in all her dimensions.

Gray's 2021 *Gallery* series, made from hand-routed plywood and custom blended spray-paint, are poised between sculpture and painting. Each work depicts a selected section of floorboards, chewed out by Borer beetles, which are known as galleries. Grey became very familiar with these patterns during recovery from a serious injury which found her lying prone on the floor of her home for countless hours. In a burst of inspiration, Grey saw something beautiful in what many would consider a major flaw. The works read as abstract paintings, yet the mark making delves beneath the surface, revealing physical depth. The lines left are evidence of life lived, in parallel with our own.

Auckland based artist, architect, urban designer and academic [Diane Brand](#) also makes her Wellington debut in *In Living Colour*, presenting a series of works selected by Agoston Cleary and Robinson for their innovative approach to both materiality and colour. Brand's work is inspired by the world-making possibilities that every day found items such as lego, vintage melamine plates, beads, washers and zip ties present when they are thought of as being capable of more than what they are intended to be. For Brand, the value of a piece lies not in its materiality or the inherent or social value of the material, but in its innovative design.

Brands' process begins with collecting a range of materials and colours, followed by careful selection from each group to create a final palette of things to work with. Using her architectural mind, Brand applies various rules and logic to inform both the mechanical and aesthetic combination of each 'construction', which are often dictated by the requirements or arrangement mandates that come from the products themselves. In a sense, Brand and the material objects themselves are creative partners, with Brand assembling and reassembling the components until a balance of form and colour is reached.

While Brand's approach and creative impulse arises from an origin point of experimental design construction, it is nevertheless a confident expression of the artist and her personal identity as an architect finding a new outlet for her drive to design, construct and build.

Originally from Switzerland and now based in Wellington [Petra Scheuber](#) is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice spans photography, installation, and light work. For *In Living Colour*, the curators selected from Scheuber's new series *Soft Vision*. Their role within the context of the show is not only to invite contemplation of the interplay between colour, human perception, and emotional well-being, but also represents a full-circle return to the soft, gentle and organic; a counter-balance to Gray and Brand's sculptural constructions.

While Scheuber's work appears, on the surface, to be organic — and therefore more real, more natural than that of some of the other artists — of all the works presented in the show, it is Scheuber who intentionally strips away the clarity of reality in order to arrive at lush fields of colour. By embracing a soft focus, these images serve as a visual language of colour, each narrating their own story. Within this artistic landscape, the mood takes centre stage, portraying emotions that are personal, impermanent, and universal.

***In Living Colour* is more than a collection and expression of female creative practice across multiple disciplines and stages of artistic career. Collectively, it is an articulation of uniquely individual, personal experiences which are, as American psychologist Carl Rogers so famously asserted, the most universal.**