

Ana Iti

Heavy to Hold

2 – 27 February 2016

Heavy to Hold explores a fragment of a larger conversation that spans a great distance, that distance being the sea wall that travels almost the entire coastline of the Otago Peninsula. Approaching local history from a visitor's perspective, **Heavy to Hold** uses research, observation and conversation as methods of connecting to the history and significance of the wall. These three components manifest in three different works in the space: a video work, audio work and sculpture.

The wall itself has been constructed over different circumstances with a variety of materials since the late 1800s and is today being altered again to make space for a new cycle way. The process of extending the width of the road involves preserving the wall by effectively burying it. Archeologists carefully cover the historic sections wall with a special geological cloth before backfilling over and around the wall leaving only a GPS trace of where it is under foot. Much of the newer sea wall is basalt sourced from Blackhead quarry. Drawn to the hand stacked honeycomb pattern seen predominately around Broad Bay, the same Blackhead basalt has been used to construct the sculpture in the main gallery space.

The video located in the second space can be described as an entry point for the viewer to experience the sea wall from the same outsider's perspective the artist has. Travelling by bus to the gallery each day, Ana watches from her seat as the top of the wall ambles in and out of view over the 20-minute journey from Broad Bay to Andersons Bay. The video explores the wall a man made drawing between the land and the sea.

Accompanying the film are two interviews that move from one to the other over the course of 20 minutes. Finding it difficult and often overwhelming to uncover the story of the sea wall, Ana settled on an aural approach to clarify what felt like an often fraught, mysterious and continuously unfolding narrative. In one interview, local archaeologist and sea wall expert Dr. Jill Hamel describes the construction of the wall. In the other, local kaumātua Edward Ellison balances Dr. Hamel with an aural history of the wall from an Ōtākou perspective. By overlapping the interviews, it becomes clearer that the significance of the wall coexists as a symbol both culturally and archaeologically.

Alongside these two research based works, a large assemblage of basalt rocks in the main gallery space presents a similar method of engagement through material and site. Sculpturally, the work echoes Robert Smithson's "Provisional Theory of Non-Sites" as it is a three-dimensional drawing or physical construction of a metaphorical idea.¹ Neither abstract nor logical, as a non-site the assemblage of basalt rocks becomes a metaphor that presents the vastly significant history the artist has been exploring.

Observing the exhibition as a whole, **Heavy to Hold** calls upon Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the contact zone. Pratt explains a contact zone as a "social space where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today."² Pratt uses the term to reconsider models of community and contrast much of the theorising of 'community' that happens in academia today. **Heavy to Hold** examines the sea wall as a symbolic object that has become a metaphor for the weight history bears on the Ōtepoti/Dunedin community today.

¹ Robert Smithson, "A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites", <http://robertsmithson.com/essays/provisional.htm>

² Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone" in *Profession* (1991), pp 33-40.

Since graduating from Ilam with a BFA (Sculpture) in 2012, Ana Iiti has maintained an active studio practice in Christchurch. Ana's current practice explores the speculative possibilities of 'drawing' using sculpture and installation along with physical and social architectures. Her 2014 exhibition *Golden Hour* at artist-run space Room Four demonstrated Ana's progression as an emerging practitioner and both Blue Oyster and Caselberg are delighted to be supporting the her practice with this opportunity to work in Dunedin. This is the first of an exciting new collaboration between the two trusts, who both share an aim to support artistic production with their respective residency spaces in Dunedin.

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