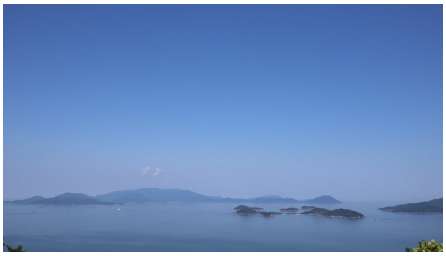
From Moutohorā to Megijima

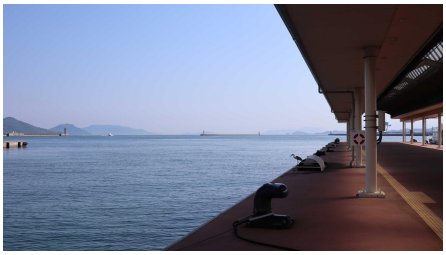
A conversation between Sarah Hudson and Joanne Coates

by

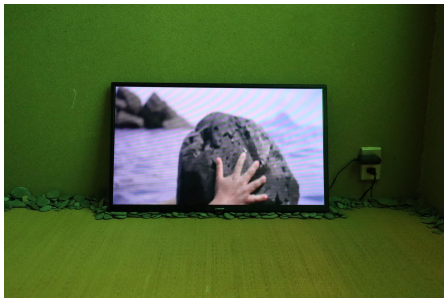
Published on 20.08.2025



The view from on top of the Seto Inland Sea Folk Museum. Photo: Sarah Hudson.



The Port at Takamatsu. Photo: Sarah Hudson.



Sarah Hudson, *Belonging* (installation view), 2025, HD video, colour, sound, 10 min. In *Reconciliation*, Setouchi Triennale, 18 April–9 November 2025. Courtesy of the artist. Videography by Nicole Hunt. Production by Rachel Anson. Music by Kahu Kutia and Sylvan Spring. Photo: Sarah Hudson.



Sarah Hudson. Photo: Sanuki Street.



Sarah Hudson, *Belonging* (video still), 2025, HD video, colour, sound, 10 min. Courtesy of the artist. Videography by Nicole Hunt. Production by Rachel Anson. Music by Kahu Kutia and Sylvan Spring.



Installation view of works by Sarah Hudson in *Reconciliation*, Setouchi Triennale, 18 April–9 November 2025. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Sanuki Street.



Sarah Hudson, from the series "The stones remember, and I listen", 2025, watercolour made from Moutohorā earth pigments and Kagawa Prefecture Aizome (indigo powder) on 640gsm watercolour paper. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Sarah Hudson.

A stone wall is both a bridge and a boundary. This is artist Sarah Hudson's (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Pūkeko, Ngāi Tūhoe) guiding image for Reconciliation*, a suite of works she produced for the 2025 Setouchi Triennale in Japan, which she adapted for simultaneous exhibition at Te Kōputu a te whanga a Toi – Whakatāne Library & Exhibition Centre, Aotearoa New Zealand. Speaking to UK artist Joanne Coates, Hudson discusses her project as an attempt to reconcile her separation from her ancestral lands, particularly the island of Moutohorā, off the coast of Whakatāne. First presented on the island of Megijima, Japan,* Reconciliation *creates a space where such feelings of dislocation and loss can be acknowledged, which, like a stone wall, links as much as it protects.*

This is a transcript of an episode of Crossing Currents, a podcast by Contemporary HUM. Listen below or wherever you get your podcasts. This transcript has been edited for clarity.

JOANNE COATES The first time I met you, you were showing your work at the Setouchi Triennale in Japan.

It was an incredible experience for me, seeing the work and then also getting to meet the artist and talk about it. That was a really interesting moment, actually getting to talk to someone about that work whilst I was seeing it in a place that was away from the “centre”.

Where you were exhibiting your work was a result of an arts residency. I wondered if you could talk about that experience and introduce the work.

SARAH HUDSON I was granted the Naoshima Art Residency programme, which is the first of its kind for Aotearoa. It’s a partnership that was bought upon by McCahon House Trust, Asia New Zealand Foundation, STILL and the Fukutake Family, who established the Triennale and the Naoshima Art Museums in general. They also have a house in Aotearoa on an island, so that's kind of their connection to Aotearoa.

I went over for a site visit in June 2024 for a week, met people, visited potential exhibition spaces and then I got to see just immediately a lot of similarities. Geologically, it was very similar to where I live. The kinds of shorelines were really recognisable and where I live in Whakatāne there are offshore islands as well.

Also sociopolitically, there were a lot of things that aligned. So, I live in Whakatāne; it's kind of more of a provincial town. There is the occurrence of all young people leaving town as soon as they become of age, and our smaller community and family units kind of struggle, compared to other generations where people stayed closer.

There is also a similar history of toxic waste dumping, which really caught my interest. Our town is situated right next to a sawmill and a pulp and paper factory, which has really detrimentally affected the environment; our waterways and also land, through dumping. So, straight away there were these parallels between where I live and where I was invited to visit. That was a really encouraging and motivating start for the project.

JC The work that I saw is called *Reconciliation*, which came out of the residency.

I'd never heard of “Garbage Island” before, which is what the locals call one of the islands, because of the toxic waste dumping. It really resonated with me that communities all over the world that are seen as marginalised in any way shape or form become the sites of this activity.

Going into seeing your work, all of a sudden, there was this deep-rooted connection that I felt was in opposition to that. I wonder if you could talk about that work, *Reconciliation*, and those themes.

SH A major, kind of bittersweet, element of being invited to Setouchi in general, but Megijima in particular, which was the island that I exhibited on, was just even being invited there, I think. There are places within Aotearoa that I have geological ties to or really close family histories with that are inaccessible. They inspire my practice every day, but I may not actually ever physically get to spend time and create there.

So I got invited away and then immediately started to miss home. But it wasn't necessarily, like, my house or that kind of idea of home, but I had this kind of longing for an island that I didn't actually have a physical relationship with, I guess. So, this whole project is kind of reconciling that through research and through relationship-building, even if it's metaphoric, or poetic, or psychic, or I don't know; through any kind of means possible to build relationships.

The exhibition site that was allocated to me on Megijima was an abandoned elementary school. The population of the island is really small, maybe 80 to 100 people are there throughout the week. At the weekend, I think the population goes up a bit. Most of the islanders are over the age of 70, so there wasn't the population to maintain the school, and it's become an exhibition centre every three years for the Triennale.

I was shown empty classrooms to choose from, an empty swimming pool was used, and then a big gym. The gymnasium is also their civil defence or emergency space for the island, so that, even though there aren't school kids there every day, it serves a purpose for the community.

I ended up choosing a really small space which used to be the nurse's office for the school, a place where students would go for respite. I was really drawn to that kind of caring, or healing, or calm nature of the room. It had a typical office space in the front, and in the back there's a tatami room. So, you take off your shoes, lie down on the mat, and have a rest. We have rooms like that at schools in Aotearoa. We call them the sick bays, and you go there and lie down if you're having a headache, like me as a child [laughs].

So, straight away I went down quiet, focused and small. I wanted this kind of reconciliation to feel calm for the audience.



Sarah Hudson, "In my teeth, the DNA of cliffs, the taste of old stories" (detail), 2025, pebbles from Megijima. In *Reconciliation*, Setouchi Triennale, 18 April–9 November 2025. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Sarah Hudson.



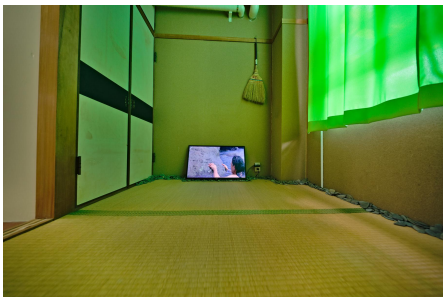
Sarah Hudson, painting from the series "The stones remember, and I listen", 2025, watercolour made from Moutohorā earth pigments and Kagawa Prefecture Aizome (indigo powder) on 640gsm watercolour paper. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Sarah Hudson.



Sarah Hudson, "The stones remember, and I listen" (detail), 2025. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Sarah Hudson.



The view northeast from Megijima. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Sarah Hudson.



Sarah Hudson, *Belonging*, 2025, installation view. Photographer: Sanuki Street.



Installation view of works by Sarah Hudson in *Reconciliation*, Setouchi Triennale, 18 April–9 November 2025. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Sanuki Street.



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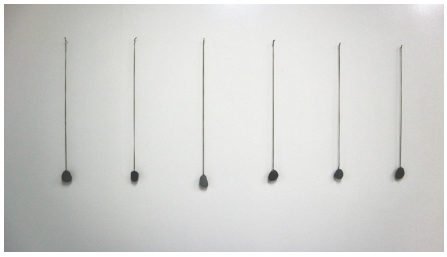


Sarah Hudson, pendants from the series "In my teeth, the DNA of cliffs, the taste of old stories", 2025, pebbles from Megijima. In *Reconciliation*, Setouchi Triennale, 18 April–9 November 2025. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Sarah Hudson.

JC I definitely think that was the feeling that came across.

So, I met you and talked to you about your work, but then we met afterwards and talked further about these themes that we're addressing here. And I think for me, my impression of you as a person was that calmness, that energy that went with your work.

Could you talk a little bit about the process of that, and bringing that kind of energy to this place and together with the local community?

SH I think, with some big, flashy, international art festivals, sometimes it feels like overstimulation station. Every artist is trying to grab your attention, and the next one is louder, the next one's brighter, the next one's got flashing lights or something, I don't know. I have definitely felt that overwhelm and fatigue that comes from these attention-drawing moments when you're walking through big festivals.

That's never really been part of my solo practice. I won't speak to my giant collective practice, where we make very eye-catching works that are huge, but I really like the simplicity and potentially feminine artmaking size, which is of the body; it's relational, it's not on a huge scale. I think that the nurse's office definitely drew that out for me.

My experience of Takamatsu, which is the town I stayed in, and Megijima, which is the town I travelled to via boat every day for residency—it's a 15–20 minute boat ride—it's all very calm. It was quite a tranquil experience on the whole, so I didn't want to disrupt that. I wanted to be respectful of the place that I was invited to show, and my way of showing respect is a kind of calm reciprocity to show what I was getting from that community.

JC That makes a lot of sense. I think for me, actually, what that enabled was for the viewer to stay longer. There is pressure when you're a visitor and there are lots of works. In Setouchi, there is a map that you can get stamps for when you see work, which is all fun and good for families, but there is the pressure of: “Okay, I need to see everything.” And to see everything, you have to do that quite quickly.

But actually, a work that doesn't scream at you through flashing lights, or it asks you politely, “Do you want to stay here for longer?” I think that that's actually really radical and important.

I was in Japan on a grant from Arts Council England called DYCP (Developing Your Creative Practice). The idea of the grant was that I'm based very rurally, and there isn’t infrastructure as an artist to have a practice. You have to go to the centre, whether that's London, Glasgow, Cardiff or smaller places like Newcastle.

We began this big conversation about working in different places, where you're really tied to people and community. What I felt with your work was there is a connection to its site specifically, but also to your home.

SH Home is always where I make from. Home being Whakatāne, where my Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Pūkeko, Ngāi Tūhoe family have always been.

I'm in this privileged position to go to these places and experience these things, and at the forefront, I'm always thinking about how my experience then gets to feed back at home, which is difficult. It's a difficult kind of responsibility to shoulder, but something

that I really wanted. Because the works were talking about these two islands, I wanted a simultaneous exhibition here in Whakatāne. That opened at the beginning of June 2025.

I opened an exhibition of works, some of which were made during residency and others were made after Setouchi opened, because I was nervous! I was really nervous about showing at home, and I decided four weeks out that the exhibition in Whakatāne needed to be much more context-specific. I wanted to give my friends and family the context that they recognised the most.

This isn't always the case that I get to show simultaneously. In fact, it's the first time that I've tried this model, and it's something that I would love to keep replicating as an artist who does get to show overseas quite a bit. I am now going to be thinking, how do I get to serve art audiences but also get invited to symposiums? Or, how can I do a talk there and a talk here? Or who else might want to talk here that I can enable to talk there? That is where I'm finding my community relationships going more and more.

JC I think that's a good point to physically describe the work. Could you describe, in Setouchi and in Whakatāne, how physically those works looked and how they were different?

SH On Megijima, when you walk into the office, there are three shelves on which I had placed watercolour works on paper, most of them unframed and created with earth pigments that I had gathered from Moutohorā, which is our offshore island here in Aotearoa, and indigo from the Takamatsu region.

On the left-hand side, there are these wearable pendants made from stones from Megijima. The video work in the tatami room is about an 11-minute long work, which you can kind of dip in and out of, or you can also watch three times in a row.

The audience for the Triennale were really interesting, because, like you say, there are these “passports” that you stamp at every single exhibit. So, there were definitely people racing around getting their passports stamped and flying through. But the kind of

magic thing about the Triennale, because it's set on 17, I think, different islands, is each island has a different ferry timetable; and for a lot of them, those ferries are hours apart. So, you are going to a small space for a chunk of time, and you don't have to be back at the ferry terminal for two or three hours. So, other times there's this really beautiful slow pace, and people are just moseying around, which is really dreamy.

In Whakatāne, I made larger paintings, so they're A1-sized watercolours on paper, with the same pigments used as the last one. The watercolours each depict fragmented kōwhaiwhai panels: motifs that would typically be used to tell a linear narrative in customary Māori painting. I've just taken small elements and tried to make sense of them, or no sense at all, depending on how you're reading it. But they depict this fragmentation of feeling separated from lands, but I have some kind of knowledge either passed down to me, or through whakapapa (genealogy), or through reading and research, or through growing up looking at this island—these kinds of bits that I'm trying to reconcile in the paintings.

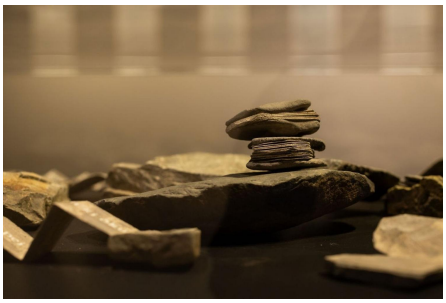
I have a whole bunch of pendants as well, stone pendants, but I've gathered the stones from here in a bay, the Whakatāne river mouth, which looks out towards Moutohorā. There's also a rock wall made from stones that were blasted off that island and brought over here. For lots of my family, the closest we kind of get to touching the island is this quarrying that happened over a hundred years ago.

I have two video works. One is the same as at Setouchi, so those are playing simultaneously in Setouchi and Whakatāne. The other is a single take of me floating in the water for 11 minutes, which I've had cool feedback from my lovely non-art community on, saying how meditative it is, which is really cool.

There are two new works in Whakatāne, inspired by an essay that was written about my Setouchi works by Matariki Williams. She wrote an essay called “A Library of Islands”, and I made a series of books out of stones. Then I went to the local museum here and got historical photographs of Moutohorā, but also of naval blasts that have happened here over time, where the Navy is called in to clear rocks for big commercial ships to come into the river mouth. Many

of those rocks had names, many of them represented either ancestors or big moments that had happened to our iwi (extended kinship group, tribe) over time, and there is this photographic evidence of this really violent blasting that's happening in our river.

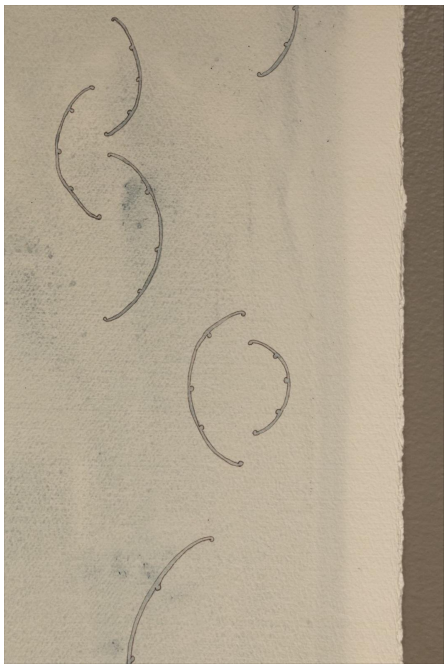
So, I wanted to include quite specific historical context to show that, over time, there have been these moments where our iwi has been forced from these places, and it affects our relationship to this day.



Installation view of works by Sarah Hudson in *The Stones Remember*, Whakatāne Art Gallery Te Kōputu a te whanga a Toi, 5 July–6 September 2025. Courtesy of Whakatāne Art Gallery Te Kōputu a te whanga a Toi. Photo: Claire House.



Sarah Hudson, *Belonging* (video still), 2025, HD video, colour, sound, 10 min. Courtesy of the artist. Videography by Nicole Hunt. Production by Rachel Anson. Music by Kahu Kutia and Sylvan Spring.



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JC One of the reasons I wanted to visit Setouchi was that it was somewhere people had talked about in terms of connecting with the community and activities that were done “with”.

SH I got to go to Megijima three times for this residency, which was really—I was going to say dictated by, but it wasn't dictated by me—it was requested by me and very flexibly allowed by McCahon House for me to split the month-long residency into a one-week site visit, two weeks in Takamatsu with my husband and my daughter, and then I went over for two weeks of install.

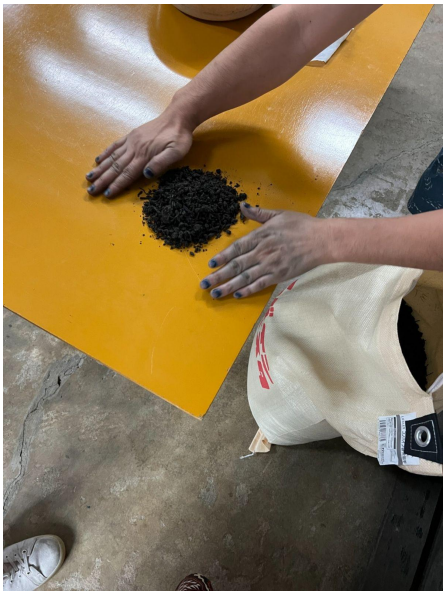
During the two-week residency, when my family joined me, we went to a junior high school and did a workshop on earth-pigment dye-making techniques with a bunch of kids who were art enthusiasts and English language learners. That was really cool. Regardless of the cultural or language barriers that I had, I just got to see kids really excited about crushing up rocks, making mud, experimenting and playing in the classroom. And that's universal. I really recognise those characters from the workshops that I do at home.

I also got to work closely with another member of the community there when I travelled to an indigo factory, and again, through language barriers, we got to share about practicing with natural materials, which we were both passionate about. We did an exchange, and I was able to use indigo pigment from that visit throughout the rest of the project. I made paint with it.

But I think visiting Megijima every day was unique. It felt really special just being welcomed onto this people's island every day. It was very humbling.



The Port at Takamatsu. Photo: Sarah Hudson.



Visit to Khimaira Dye Studio. Photo: Sarah Hudson.



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JC What was it like being able to take your family on residency? Because, unfortunately, that is a real rarity, but it's so important to making.

SH I have been on two longer-term residences now, where I've got to bring my family. We homeschool our daughter to enable this kind of travel. It's our ambition to lead a kind of artistic, creative life, and seeking out those opportunities has been difficult.

To see individual artists be able to apply for residencies or opportunities that bank on just one single person coming is difficult. But I think being a part of a collective for 12, 13 years, where we need the institution to cover travel for and to host four of us, asking for these things has become the default mode. Maybe sometimes, it's a bit mind-boggling for them, but you kind of get over that. Through Mataaho Collective, we got to say over and over again to institutions, “This is part of our practice. This is how we practice, and there has to be four of us.” And mostly everyone said, “Okay, sure, four of you come over here.”

It's been empowering, and it has just set me in good stead for asking, requesting—I don't know how else to say it—but asking for what you need as an artist, which is really important. Whether you're bringing along four people or it's just you, I think requesting what you need and saying what you need—it takes practice, but it's really powerful.

JC That goes back to the principles of care that you were talking about.

There is your arts practice in terms of the presentation, the physical, but there are also these kinds of extensions of it. One of the things that really came out of the conversation we had was your relationship with the land, and how you'd brought that into the residency with the pigments and the soil, and that openness to your surroundings but also your local knowledge from home.

How do your relationships with land, community and local knowledge shape your practice?

SH It really easily shapes my practice at home. With the exhibition here in Whakatāne, I don't kind of have to do the groundwork, or do as much groundwork, perhaps? That’s not always true. Māori art making practice doesn't have the kind of lineage of other, more central customary making practices, like carving or weaving. So, I guess it does have a bit of explaining to do, but maybe Indigenous context as a whole doesn't need to be explained here in Aotearoa.

I'm always conscious of presenting my work internationally, because, like you say, a lot of those kinds of conversations that happen between curators and artists are in the background. There's so much of those that go on. There's so much research and only so much, or so little, that you actually get to present to the public. How do all of us, as artists, edit and refine to uphold that knowledge, that work and those relationships?

I guess I'm always tossing up what to present and where, and I think context is so important everywhere you go. This exhibition here at home had weirdly a lot of pressure on it for me; more than if I was showing at a gallery outside of my hometown. I wasn't anticipating how much I cared. I think it's the care thing again, but I really cared about presenting this work to these people.

Not that I don't everywhere else. It's a different part of my brain, I think, or it's a different part of me that goes into it. For Setouchi Triennale, I was interested in presenting a work where, regardless of your knowledge of the Māori world, you can look at the materials, and you can look at the final product, and you can go, "That, that and that is that," and hopefully draw something aesthetically from the pieces. But it's a juggle.

JC There was something for me about the wall that you talked about. In the exhibition space, the stone wall goes all the way down its length. It reminded me of some of the walls in Scotland or Ireland. There are the agricultural ones, but some of those were made through forced labour of people who were cleared from those areas, so it reminded me of those histories as well.

SH Another similarity between Megijima and Moutohorā was stone walls. There was this stone masonry on Megijima that I got to walk along that reminded me of stone masonry that I had read about on Moutohorā. There are stone palisades, protective stone walls, on Moutohorā that are left over from pā (fortified village, fort, stockade) sites, where people were living and defending. There are also stone wahi tapu, which are ritual spaces, all of which I've only read about in archaeological reports.

I started thinking about these stone walls as very a deliberate, human interaction with land. Each one is placed by someone who knows how to place it. There's so much knowledge in the placement of those rocks and that they can withstand the elements, time, sea breezes. There's a real beauty in stone walls that they hold so much.

In Megijima, I made a stone wall from rocks from Megijima. That was a last-minute practical decision. My paintings are quite ephemeral. I think that I referenced leaning into the feminine and some of that rebellion. Also, I don't want to put things in frames… Initially, there were pieces of watercolour paper that were pretty heavy, 640gsm, but they were just leaning against the wall on shelves. So, the exhibition team came in and were like, “Can we pin those down for safety? And also, can we put up a barrier, so people won't step too close to them?” I think that this also comes from being a mum and working with kids and in workshops, like, it's actually okay if one of them falls off the wall, and then someone can pick it up and put it back on. There's a robustness in this artwork; like yes, fragility, but also strength.

I want the space to be inviting, and a rope stanchion was not top of my list. So, I slept on it and decided to build a stone wall, basically, which I quite liked, because for this whole project, this metaphor or motif of stone walls has been a kind of bridge for me to link. On Megijima, they're also really protective. There is this wind that comes every afternoon, and the walls are built specifically in those directions to protect.

As well as being a bridge, I brought in the stone wall to also be a boundary, and it’s sculpturally really yum too to have the actual rocks in there. I was really happy. The more rocks, the better.



The artist on Megijima. Photo: Sarah Hudson.



Sarah Hudson, *The Stones Remember and I Listen*, 2025, installation view. Photographer: Sanuki Street.

JC I love that idea, because when you see a rope stanchion or a metal wire in front of an artwork, both of them are quite hostile, like that art world idea of pieces being really expensive or untouchable. In Setouchi, the wall for me became a part of the work. The pieces are incredibly delicate and beautiful, but because it's not a high wall, people can still lean and look over to the work and experience it.

Touching on those ideas, I wondered if you could talk about that art world approval, and making work in a slightly different way. This exhibition is the perfect example of bringing different kinds of ethics, different kinds of knowledges, to a space to create an incredible exhibition.

SH I had something happen during this install, which was unusual, or it was unexpected. I was asked to make the work louder. I had created this installation, and I was really happy with it, in exhibiting at the elementary school.

I was showing with two male artists, who had very bright, bold, colourful works. I was invited at the last minute to create a mural that took up more space, basically. In that moment, I had to really

defend the quietness of my work, and I totally get the pressure of art festival works to be big and loud and colourful, but to uphold the integrity of my work and what I wanted to do, I had to be quite bold in holding that back. I'm really happy that I did.

I think that's where this weird binary idea of the work being feminine comes from. I felt in between two quite masculine forces and wanted to maintain a quiet space for reflection, or nothing. I didn't want to blow people away in that regard.

JC It's a quiet rebellion, and it's a feminist rebellion. This was the work that I connected with more because of that.

What I hope is that expectations around art and what it is are changing. I think by standing your ground, and saying that, "No, this is actually the work", that it does help, but it also says that there is a long way to go, right?

Do you think that it's changing? Are artists still expected to conform to this Western idea of an artist?

SH I think that I come from centuries of makers, who have always made and always will. The Western art world was a pretty recent invention, I think [laughs].

Recognition, cool. Fees, great. I'm happy to buy in, when the context is right and when it suits. I think maintaining and knowing who you are is how you get to engage in a grounded way. There is heaps of room for change, and also there is heaps of potential for us to create our own spaces. I'm a big believer in that as well. Like, yeah, get a seat at the table, or make your own table.

JC I think that it's like, yeah, is it a table? Or is it a rock in a field that we're sitting around?

This podcast episode was produced with the support of McCahon House, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, with

editing and mixing by Marc Chesterman, graphic design by Emma Kaniuk and music by João Veríssimo.

Click here for Through Air, Breath and Stone: Correspondences Between Two Islands*, an essay by Yuka Keino published as part of our coverage of Hudson's participation in the Naoshima Art Residency and Setouchi Triennale, supported by McCahon House.*

Biographies



Joanne Coates is a working class visual artist based in the North East of England. Through photography, installation, and audio, she explores rural life, hidden histories, and class inequality. Her work asks questions about power, identity, wealth, and poverty with work rooted in lived experience across class, gender, and disability. Participation and community are central to her practice. She is the UK House of Commons Election Artist for 2024 and the recipient of the 2024 Baltic Vasseur Arts Award for *The Middle of Somewhere*. In 2021, she received the Jerwood/Photoworks Award.

McCAHON HOUSE

Based in Aotearoa New Zealand, McCahon House deliver a programme designed around the concept of supporting artists at pivotal points in their careers. This includes national and international career-defining residencies and celebrating artists through events and commissioned essays, as well as education initiatives and resources.

The Tomorrow Group are McCahon House patrons that support our bold and ambitious projects with international scope, including the Naoshima Artist Residency. They enable artists to extend their practice in different contexts, engage in international exchange and contribute to global discourse.



Sarah Hudson is a Ngāti Awa, Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Pūkeko artist, researcher, and mum from Whakatāne, Aotearoa. As a founding member of Kauae Raro Research Collective, Sarah has spent the last five years promoting Māori earth pigment paint-making practices. She splits her time between home-educating her 10-year-old, implementing research projects for Kauae Raro, and creating large-scale installations with Mataaho Collective.

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