Test Run

Three New Zealand Artists on their Residencies at London's Gasworks

by Jennifer Thatcher

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Hikalu Clarke, Gasworks International Residency Programme, 2018.

Katrina Beekhuis, Gasworks International Residency Programme, 2017.

Sriwhana Spong, Gasworks International Residency Programme, 2016.

Gasworks is a gallery and studio complex sited near the iconic Oval cricket ground in South London. Founded in 1994, it offers up to 16 international residencies a year, for three months at a time, alongside longer-term studio provision for London-based artists. A succession of New Zealand artists recently undertook residencies at Gasworks: Sriwhana Spong in 2016, Katrina Beekhuis in 2017, and Hikalu Clarke, who is mid-way through his. The Residency for New Zealand artists at Gasworks is made possible through the generosity of the Jan Warburton Charitable Trust, with support from David and Libby Richwhite, Josephine and Ross Green, and the many individuals who make up the New Zealand Friends of Gasworks. Creative New Zealand have supported the travel costs for each participating artist and Elam School of Fine Arts, the University of Auckland is also partner.

Jennifer Thatcher spoke to all three about their experiences of relocating to London and how the residency affected their work – and life. All praise the warmth and the community atmosphere at Gasworks, as well as the lack of prescribed outcome for artist-residents. They admit to missing their partners, and offer advice for anyone thinking of applying, including which is the best bedroom and how to avoid the 'grim' cautionary tales of fellow New Zealanders living in London. Here's what they said.

Wall vent (filler) in progress by Katrina Beekhuis, 2017.

Katrina Beekhuis, *Inlaid lino floor mat / Veiled window*, installation shot, Gasworks, 2017.

Katrina Beekhuis, routered floor for *Inlaid lino floor mat*, 2017.

Katrina Beekhuis, Gasworks International Residency Programme, 2017.

JENNIFER THATCHER What is/was expected of you during your Gasworks residency?

KATRINA BEEKHUIS I think there was a base expectation that you would use the time in a way that was most valuable to you as an artist. In saying that, there was a framework that fed directly into the residency programme: facilitating connections with local curators, other residency artists, and patrons who supported your particular residency. We also had meetings with postgraduate curatorial students from Goldsmiths, University of London which was interesting. This involved the expectation that you could speak competently about your practice as well as being communicative and respectful to others and to the opportunities this residency afforded.

SRIWHANA SPONG From memory, nothing was expected other than to participate in the Open Studios at the end of the residency.

HIKALU CLARKE Well, straight away, it was pretty clear that this was a research trip and residency so there was no endpoint in terms of having an exhibition or anything like that. It was really about development; seeing where my practice could go during this time. Gasworks is a great hub to facilitate and support that.

It's been really good so far. It's mainly just having time: not having to worry about paying the bills, and just being able to sit in my studio and make work. It's great because everyone here is well-connected, and so they are putting you in contact with other industry people as well.

Also, going to see work has been huge because New Zealand is such a small pool, whereas I have every resource here. My favourite show so far is Lawrence Abu Hamdan at the Chisenhale Gallery. The exhibition is about the idea of the 'ear witness': he interviews people who've been through prison in Syria and asks them about the sound of someone being beaten, for example. Architecturally, the exhibition works really well. There's this isolated square booth in the centre of the gallery that plays sound; it emulates the deprivation of light as experienced in those prisons. It was really amazing seeing the Turner Prize, too, because it's such a major exhibition.

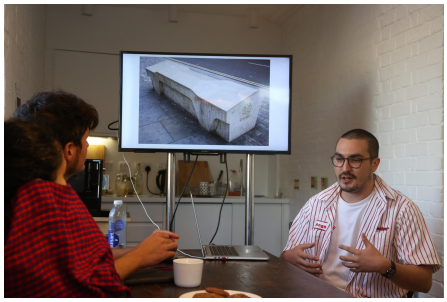
JT Did you feel any expectation to represent 'New Zealand'? Or some other aspect of your identity? Or, rather, do international residencies tend to presume you are a well-travelled, 'global' artist, able to adapt anywhere?

KB This is an interesting question. I did not feel an overt sense to represent 'New Zealand'. I was going in as myself, although being from New Zealand cannot help but inform my world view and practice. My work does not speak directly to my identity as a female and/or Pākehā of Dutch descent, or my childhood

explicitly, but I did come to sense more acutely that there was a kind of residue that seeps into my mode of seeing, which is a result of growing up in New Zealand. I don't think this residency necessarily expected participants to be a well-travelled person, but having travelled to Europe before did make preparation and the realities of living there clearer.

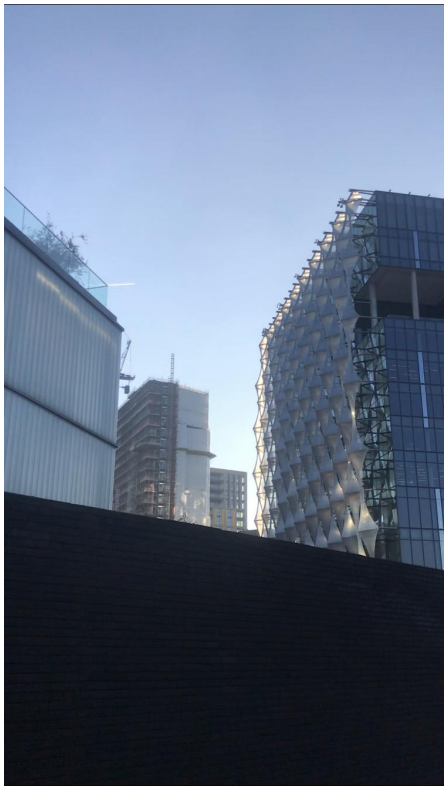
HC From New Zealand, it's far less of a culture shock coming to London. If I was from another country that wasn't a Western country, it'd be very different. I don't feel like I've had to adapt in any way, really. But in terms of representing New Zealand, I don't think of it as representing the country as such. It's more that I'd love to see this programme continue, and so I feel some sense of duty to make sure I use it well, to ensure that another artist can have the same opportunity as I had.

SS From my experience, every residency is different and has different expectations. I think it's always about using the resources provided to ensure getting out of the residency what your practice needs at the time – and that will always be different. Coming into Gasworks I never felt any expectations to represent anything other than my practice. I wouldn't know what it means to represent 'New Zealand', but I do feel a certain responsibility to a community of peers in New Zealand, as I know how important opportunities like Gasworks can be when you are geographically far from the places where art has accumulated.

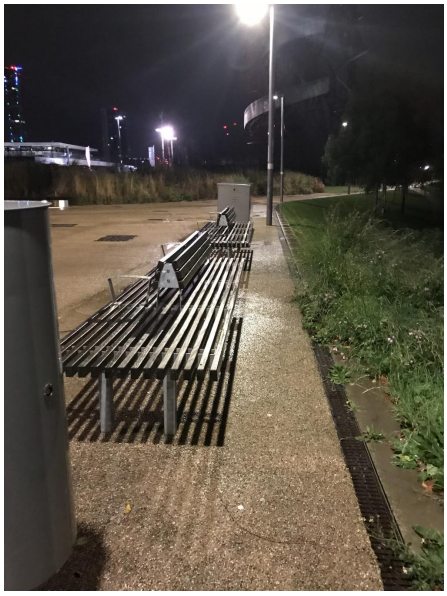


Hikalu Clarke, Gasworks International Residency Programme, 2018.

Site research in London, 2018. Photo by Hikalu Clarke.



Site research in London, 2018. Photo by Hikalu Clarke.



Site research in London, 2018. Photo by Hikalu Clarke.

JT How did it feel to relocate?

SS I came to Gasworks straight after finishing a residency in Pittsburgh. They are such different cities that it was quite intense moving from one completely different environment to

another and having to adapt quickly in order to make the most of the residency period.

KB Three months is a strange time period. It is enough to embed into a city, especially with a house and studio set-up like this, but also a short time in which to produce a whole body of work in a completely new location. My partner was based in New Zealand so there was a mix of emotions with missing his company as well as the excitement of being in a new city. My sister and her family live a couple of hours outside of London and that was great to get my fix of greenery and space.

Gasworks has been operating as a residency programme for some time, and they have evened out many of the issues associated with relocating. They supply a terraced house on South Lambeth Road in Stockwell, one Tube stop from Vauxhall where Gasworks is located. Each of the four artists gets a room. These bedrooms were thoughtfully furnished, having a bed, bedding, desk, cupboard and lamps, which created a comfortable transition into a new location. As New Zealand is 24 hours away and much less populated, having a warm place to come home to – away from the intensity of London – was a welcome relief.

HC The accommodation is in a perfect location for someone who's not familiar with London because you're a minute away from Stockwell Tube station, which is on both the Victoria and Northern lines. It makes getting around London super easy.

I'm sharing the house with three artists: one from Chile, one from Peru and one from Pakistan. We've built this nice family camaraderie. You always get a little bit nervous when you go into a house where you don't know anyone else. But then you're all relatively similar people in that you're all artists and you're all there for the same reasons. We're at similar stages of our careers, too. It's really awesome being able to watch other people's practices unfold. It's the same thing as going to uni where you get to see your peers and how they grow.

Every time I meet New Zealanders living in London, it's always the same spiel: when you start living here, you're going to feel incredibly lonely for the first three years. It's okay to be an alcoholic in London; everyone's constantly drinking. And they're always really grim about everything. But I already had a group of people I knew here, and Gasworks is very friendly and warm. There's a community vibe as opposed to being an artist inside a box.

JT How much planning did you do?

SS Most of my planning was around the project that I wanted to do. There was a specific document at the British Library that I wanted to look at – the oldest known manuscript of *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Dictated by the English mystic of the title, it is considered to be the first autobiographical work in the English language. It is a strange book that exceeds easy classification and brings to life not a singular person but a variety of possible identities: mother, wife, heretic, laywoman. The project ended up changing somewhat after I was denied access – there are some things you can't plan for. The resulting film, *This Creature*, takes as its starting point this failed request. The desire to touch, being touched, and the variety of illnesses ascribed by scholars to what Margery calls her gift of weeping brush against questions of voice – having a voice, hearing voices, speaking other voices. The film, shot on an iPhone, depicts a series of 'feelies' (what I decided would be the mystic version of a selfie) with sculptural and architectural elements in Hyde Park (of which public access depends on the grace and favour of The Crown) and the tame birds who inhabit it.

KB For me, most of the planning went into securing extra funding to go to Documenta 14 in Kassel and Sculpture Projects in Münster prior to the residency. I also planned a list of materials as I draw on a wide variety of items. I had previously visited London and knew it was difficult to negotiate, particularly in terms of finding very specific materials. Many fabricators and manufacturers are located outside of London and so samples are

often sent via post rather than seen first-hand – and this can make material decisions a lot more drawn-out. With hindsight, I would say it's good to have a solid plan in terms of what you want to do and stick to it, with minor adjustments. I ended up producing five works, two of which I was pleased with, although the other three were very useful in terms of experimentation with process and ideas. A lot of the experience is taking it all in, letting it absorb and reflect on how other economies and social, geographical and cultural aspects interplay to affect thinking.

Hikalu Clarke, Open Studios at Gasworks London, 2018. Photo: Contemporary HUM.

Katrina Beekhuis, Gasworks International Residency Programme, 2017.

Sriwhana Spong, Gasworks International Residency Programme, 2016.

JT What advice might you offer other artists considering a Gasworks residency?

HC I would thoroughly recommend getting there as early as you can on the first day. Everyone starts on 1 October, but it's first come, first served in terms of your bedroom. I think I nailed it! There's a room on the second floor in the middle, and it's the best room. Your windows open so you get a breeze, you get good light in there, and it's definitely the biggest as well. This is key knowledge…

JT How different was the reality from your expectations? From other residencies?

HC I haven't done any other residencies – I only finished my Master's two years ago – so I can't answer that question, but I don't think I realised the gravity of the opportunity until I came over here. I was like, cool, I got a residency. And then I came over, and I was like, *I've got a residency*. It hit me how incredible this is: just being able to have time to think about my work for so long. Maybe it's because I was trying to block it out as I didn't really want to overthink it.

KB This was my first residency so I don't have anything to compare it to, but two of the other residency artists had been on previous ones and felt that Gasworks was particularly supportive and immersive. In terms of what I had been led to understand, it met my expectations. There were events to begin with but after the initial weeks we were left more or less to continue on our work. The facilities at Gasworks did exceed my expectations. The building itself had been renovated relatively recently and housed decent-sized studios, as well as a gallery, a larger room for talks and dinners, and a shared kitchen with a long dining table which facilitated lunches, general discussion and encouraged a relaxed atmosphere.

SS I've found each residency I've done has offered something different. But Gasworks was exceptional – the studios are really good, as is the location, and the facilities, but the staff really made my time at Gasworks both productive and memorable.

Thinking through possibilities for *This Creature* (at home in the residency accomodation). Image courtesy of Sriwhana Spong.

Viewing Nijinsky costumes at Blythe House on a seperate research trip. Image courtesy of Sriwhana Spong.

Gasworks visit to the V&A collection stored at Blythe House. Image courtesy of Sriwhana Spong.

JT How did the residency affect your work/life?

SS I was able to test out a few things in the work I made called *This Creature*. Because I felt that the Open Studios, not exactly being an exhibition, could hold something more provisional, more of a work in progress, I was looser than I might normally be in my approach. It wasn't till I subsequently decided to return to the work for an exhibition at Michael Lett [in Auckland] that I realised it wasn't a provisional piece, but a ready work. There was a lesson in this looseness that I have since taken on board.

KB Because I draw on a wide breadth of materials and the minute material qualities impact the work heavily, I found it difficult to easily source what I needed. However, overall it built confidence and widened my view as to the scale and facets of the art world. It gave me a certain optimism as well. I got practise at engaging with curators which is not something I had had much previous experience with. I was part of a group and solo exhibition when I got back to New Zealand and I think this was in part due to the flow-on effect of Gasworks.

In terms of experience, Gasworks provided me the first opportunity to experiment with processes I had not previously been able to engage with. For example, I had wanted to chisel into a wall to inlay a work which was composed of Pollyfilla (wall filler) – this needed heavy sanding and therefore created a lot of dust! For some time, I had also wanted to embed linoleum or inlay wood into the floor – this was based on the kind of commercial floor mat you see at entranceways to many buildings. The idea was to create a flush surface, where the work was compressed or embedded into the physical space to create a seamless equilibrium with what was introduced and what was pre-existing. This was a methodology to test out ideas around object-oriented ontology and ecological psychology.

HC It's being able to slow down and not having to make work towards a deadline, which I'm always used to thinking about. It's being able to flesh things out in a more open manner. Pressure-wise, it feels very different. It's about having time to develop and see things from a new angle, which maybe previously I wouldn't have been able to.

My whole residency is focused on the interesting spatial politic that's occurring within the Vauxhall Nine Elms Battersea redevelopment, including Battersea Power Station, not far from Gasworks. The whole point is that there is going to be a re-centralisation of diplomatic and economic power into these incredible high-rises that are being built. Architecture and space are personal, physical experiences, so without being able to be there, my work wouldn't be the same and some of it wouldn't have come about. What really struck me was the weird silence of that whole area. It's so inhumane in a lot of ways. I don't think it's going to be that unfriendly, but when you're in the space, you can really understand how a certain passive-aggressive politic operates.

In terms of my life, it was always a plan to move over here. I looked at this as a test-run: do I want to live in London? And after this, it has become a very resounding yes. It's a nice thing to know that I can spend three months away from my girlfriend, and it's okay. She's coming over here from December till January and we're going to come back here next June.

Mahbub Jokhio, Katrina Beekhuis, Patricia Dominguez, Andres Pereira-Paz, Gasworks London 2017.

Sriwhana Spong, Gasworks International Residency Programme, 2016.

This Creature (2016), HD video, 14'55. Image courtesy of Sriwhana Spong.

Katrina Beekhuis, *Print of two tables*, modeled off photograph of prototype tables by Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanette and Charlotte Perriand from 1928, 2018.

JT Is the artist residency a worthwhile model for artists – at what stage(s) in an artist's career is it most useful?

KB I think it's incredibly worthwhile as it's a method that sits outside of an academic structure but still offers support and allows you to challenge your practice. Residencies are also a viable option for artists who are looking for support that is outside of the commercial sphere. I think international residencies expose you to the realities for artists in other countries and how the circumstances in those places impact or shape their practices and work. I think they are a healthy way to get perspective on your

position as an artist in your own country as well as within the wider world/art world.

SS I'm always stimulated by a new environment and new people, so the residency model works well for me. It's always nice to discover other practices by working alongside them with the intimacy and intensity that a residency can produce. I think any point in an artist's practice could do with a few months in a supportive environment being able to focus solely on your work.

JT Do you have any thoughts as to how the residency model might evolve in the future?

KB I'm interested to see how residencies will develop. To me, some of the most valuable conversations came from artist-to-artist meetings that happened in loose or everyday communal spaces such as the kitchen or studio. More direct facilitation of artist-to-artist contact would have been great. However, the overall experience of moving your practice from one location where it has links and a certain lineage to another location, and the observations and reshaping that goes with that, is both incredibly challenging and valuable.

SS I've noticed a real lack of residencies that support artists with families – mothers who may need to bring their children with them. This needs to change, otherwise residencies will remain a privileged experience for a certain type of artist.

Since the residency, Sriwhana Spong moved to London. She has recently finished editing a reader H, which includes writing by Kate Briggs, Francesco Ventrella, Vera Mey, Jan Verwoert, Ned McConnell and herself, and which was recently launched at Michael Lett gallery, Auckland. She is currently working on an exhibition for Spike Island, opening in April 2019.
www.michaellett.com/artist/sriwhana-spong/

Katrina Beekhuis returned to live and work in Auckland, New Zealand. She recently had a solo exhibition at SOFA campus gallery at The University of Canterbury and is currently working towards a show at Enjoy gallery in Wellington.
www.gasworks.org.uk/residencies/katrina-beekhuis-2017-10-02/
www.blogs.canterbury.ac.nz/insiders/2018/10/05/katrina-beekhuis-exhibition-pensieri/

Hikalu Clarke's Gasworks residency finishes on 17 December 2018 and he is planning on moving to London in 2019.
www.hikaluclarke.com/
www.gasworks.org.uk/residencies/hikalu-clarke-2018-10-01/

Biographies

Hikalu Clarke lives and works in Auckland. Resent solo exhibitions include *Necessary Threat*, Blue Oyster, Dunedin; *ITS A POND, NOT A MOAT*, MEANWHILE artist-run initiative, Wellington (both 2017). Recent group exhibitions include *Molly Morpeth Canaday 3D Award*, Whakatane Museum (2018); *Glaistor Ennor Award*, Sanderson Gallery, Auckland; *The Tomorrow People*, Adam Art Gallery, Wellington (all 2017); *HOTEL DEVON ISLAND*, collaborative exhibition with Rainer Weston, DEMO, Auckland; *SEMI FINA*L, DEMO, Auckland; and *Eating grapes while walking through a forest*, DEMO, Auckland (all 2016).

Katrina Beekhuis was born in Ōtautahi and lives and works in Tāmaki Makaurau. Her work is concerned with the perceptual processes through which we understand, measure and interpret the world. She frequently re-presents incidental, everyday objects and features of her environment by expanding, contracting, revealing and concealing, seeking to unsettle our experience of them from single, unreflective conceptions.

Beekhuis is currently a Doctoral candidate at Elam School of Fine Arts and works as a teaching assistant in the Critical Studies Programme led by Jon Bywater. Recent exhibitions include *Walking backwards*, Enjoy Contemporary Art Space, Wellington (2019); *Pensieri*, SOFA Gallery, Ilam School of Fine Arts, The University of Canterbury (2018); *Things i know*, Open studios Gasworks, London (2017); *Potters pink*, Te Tuhi Centre For The Arts, Auckland (2016); *grammars*, Dunedin Public Art Gallery (2016); *Soft Architecture*, Malcolm Smith Gallery, Howick, Auckland (2016). In 2017 she was the New Zealand Artist in Residence at Gasworks, London.

Sriwhana Spong's practice moves between film, painting, performance and sculpture. Born in Aotearoa and of Indonesian and Pākehā descent, Spong often works with everyday materials and offers installations that encompass sculptural, musical and performative dimensions that inspire moments of gathering, listening and transformation. Her recent work has focused on the relationship between the body, language and sound, as inspired by the practices of medieval female mystics.

Jennifer Thatcher is a freelance writer, lecturer and public programmes curator based in Folkestone, United Kingdom.

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