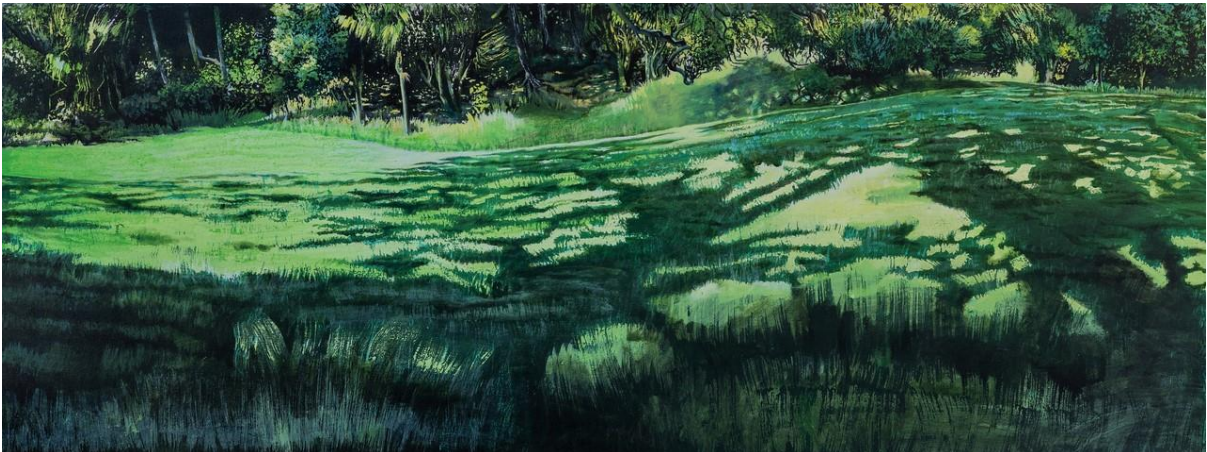


BETWEEN SHOWERS  
*Paintings Whakanewha*

Clive Humphreys

Waiheke Community Art Gallery

April 5 – May 12 2024

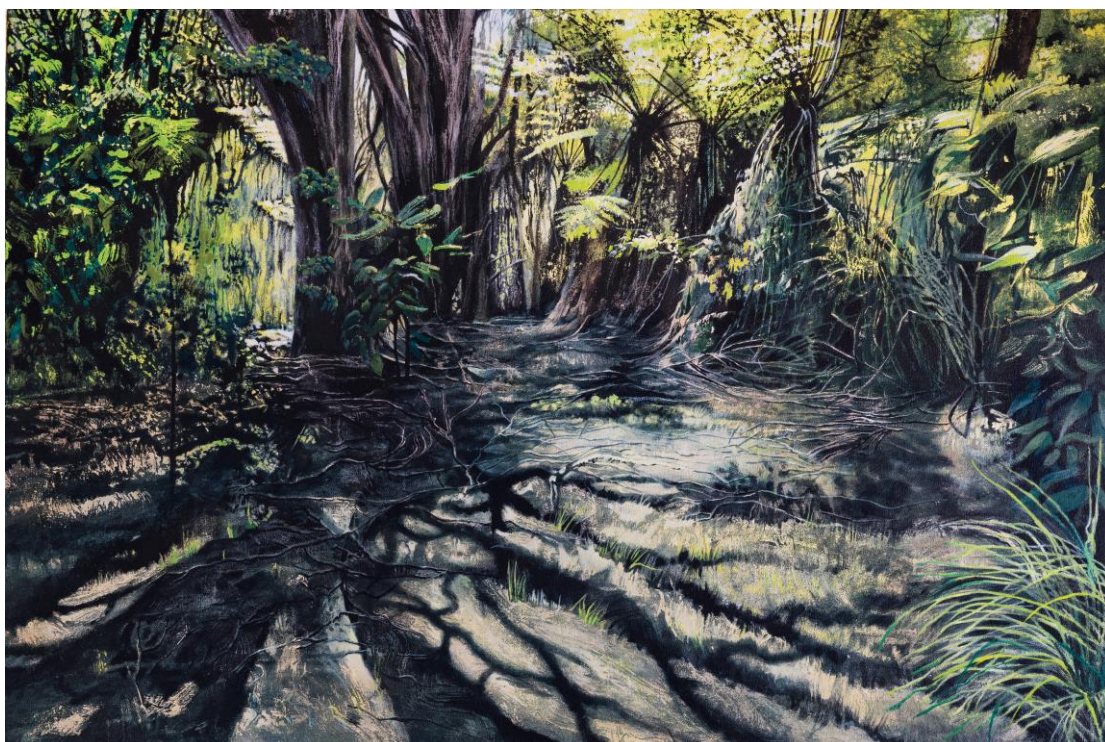


Cover image: *Roll*, acrylic on canvas, 2023-24

BETWEEN SHOWERS Paintings, Whakanewha, 2024 Clive Humphreys  
Q&A with C R Lark

*Do not be angry with the rain; it simply does not know how to fall upwards.*

Vladimir Nabokov



*Between Showers*

*acrylic on canvas*

*2023-2024*

Q: Your new works mark a shift from black and white to colour, what motivated this change in your painting?

A: Since starting my art practice in 1975, with my first show in 1978, I've considered myself a colourist, because on and off I always made colour screenprints and colour paintings. Then in 2005, I began working solely in black and white until 2019. After those fourteen years of making monochrome charcoals and watercolours, I felt ready to use the tonal knowledge I'd gained in colour.

Q: What are the new concerns in these colour works?

A: Building colour in translucent layers is a different proposition from building tone. I needed to address shifting colour values within shadow,



reflected colour and cast colour. Also, I developed a fascination with what can be implied within the image that is outside the picture frame. For example, tree shadows may project into the image or glimpses of sky might be reflected in water. All these extensions of the pictorial plane suggest a larger, more enveloping space; what is present above or behind the viewer, out of sight. There is no formal perspective in nature, so distance has to be realised through modulation of the painted marks.

Q: All these paintings are concerned with light. What particular aspects of light have informed them?

A: I've been more preoccupied with morning light and winter light when the sun is low in the sky and more horizontal in direction. Sunlight causes the trees to superimpose graphic elements on themselves. Cast shadows from branches above break up the forms of the branches below. The criss-cross patterns of light make a percussive rhythm.



*Reach*

*acrylic on canvas*

*2023-2024*

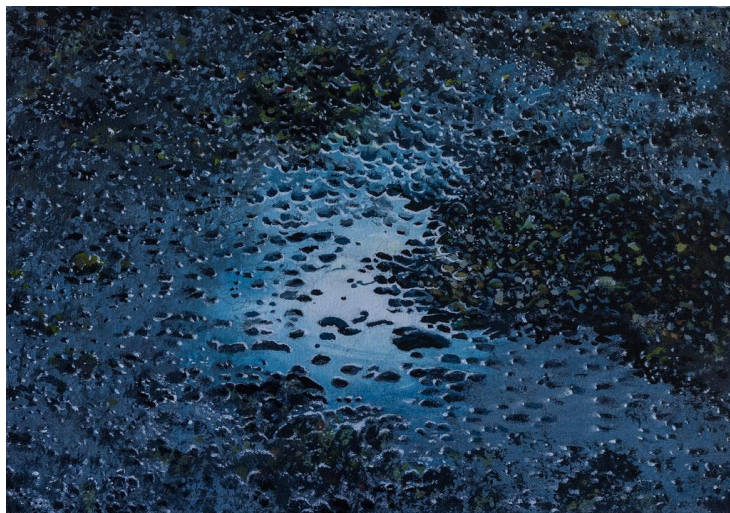
Q: The set of smaller paintings all contain vistas of sky even though the viewpoint is looking downwards. How did this series of images emerge?

A: I wanted to find subject matter that would allow me to work smaller and more intimately. The waterlogged ground that resulted from the

saturation of winter rain from cyclones in 2023 presented this opportunity. I saw small mirror images of forest and skies in the flood pools. Mark making is reduced as well as subject matter, brush marks and their textures are finer and less expansive than the larger scale paintings. In these smaller works, the painting gestures are more often from the wrist than from the arm.



*Soak* acrylic on canvas 2023-24



*Tidal Blue* acrylic on canvas 2023-24

Q: Do you work in the studio or on site?

A: Both. Site drawing is often a foundation for studio painting, but sometimes a drawing is a finished work. I prefer to be within a place, to feel immersed rather than at a distance, outdoors with the sensory input of light, air, sounds and movement, surrounded by the subject to



experience the specific characteristics of branches, leaves, light and shadow, soil, roots and the relationships between them. As Saul Bellow describes the world of trees:

*If they were not all so particular, detailed, and very rich I might have more rest from them. But I am a prisoner of perception, a compulsory witness. They are too exciting.*

Herzog Saul Bellow (The Viking Press 1964)

Just being in the place informs paintings that come later, directly or indirectly. In the studio, the emphasis shifts to the demands and constraints of a composition. Making the painting cohere often requires a slow way of working with much editing and revision.



Double page sketchbook

2022

Q: What attracts you to a particular location?

A: For the last fifteen years, I have worked from a small area at Whakanewha Regional Park where the forest meets the shoreline, a sanctuary for nesting native birds on Waiheke Island. Whakanewha was an important Maori pa site with a large settlement supported by a plentiful food supply from land and sea. A track leads into a Nikau palm forest and I spent five years making interior forest drawings and paintings of the interwoven Nikau fronds between trunks and those fallen on the forest floor, which is both a cemetery and a nursery.

Q: Would you say you have a sense of identification with the place where you are painting?

A: Yes, I identify with that environment. In fact, the act of painting requires a fundamental bodily identification with the trees: a transposition of sight into gesture, using brushes and paint, which accumulates into a painted surface that alludes to space. Even in the most abstract of images, the surface has an apparent depth, perceived as foreground and background. My surfaces are densely activated and untidy. Many painters like to tidy the landscape as if it were a suburban garden, which seems to me a resistance to the complexity of nature. I've always been drawn to organic untidiness. My painting is an acknowledgement of detritus and messy death. The artwork is a physical response through a manipulation of materials that describes my relationship with sky, sea, landforms and the forest architecture.



*The Glade*

*acrylic on canvas*

2022-23

Q: What do you mean by the term 'forest architecture'?

A: The disposition of the ancient trees, the way they interlock with one another as well as each tree's individual structure. Pohutukawa grow branches that can turn into roots to support the tree and probe fissures in the rocks for moisture. Some branches act as pillars and some as crossbeams. So the analogy with architecture extends from individual

tree structures to the forest as an interdependent network. Forest architecture has an understated grandeur.



*Spring*

*acrylic on canvas*

*2023-24*

Q Has this encounter with Whakanewha in any way changed your working methods?

A: Yes. My growing commitment to the particularities of place contradicts much of my formal training that promoted the value of close observation, but was actually more concerned with distilled generalisations. My student understanding and experience of Modernism was of a process of simplification, a paring away of detail in search of a Platonic essence, gleaned more from what was unsaid than directly stated during crits, when lecturers would suggest erasure and abbreviations, the subtext always to get rid of what was labelled as extraneous elements. The effect was that subjects became summarised.

Q: At art schools in the sixties Minimalism was fashionable, viewed as striving towards an essence. Did you agree with your lecturers' suggestions?

A: I was persuaded at the time. But essence, as a reductive impulse, no longer seems viable to me. However, my instinctive aesthetic, forged through my formative years at art school, is still Modernist. The consequence is a tension between complexity, as evident in the natural world, and learned Modernist habits. This conflict plays out on the



painted surface and is a dilemma shared by many whose working life spans major shifts in attitudes to the practice of painting

Q: What are your materials for these new colour works?

A: Acrylic paint on canvas and paper. This was my preferred medium until 2010, so I'm familiar with the requirements, but the way I use acrylics has changed radically over a decade, informed by using watercolour and exploiting its transparency. Acrylic washes can be achieved via glazing mediums whereas simply adding water weakens the surface integrity of the painting.

Q: How do you achieve the textural qualities in the work?

A: In both watercolours and acrylic paintings, I use a liquid stop-out to create stencil-like brush marks, which I later erase to reveal the underneath colour. Working from light to dark protects the lighter layers beneath. This technique borrows heavily from my printmaking experience.



*Veil*

*acrylic on canvas*

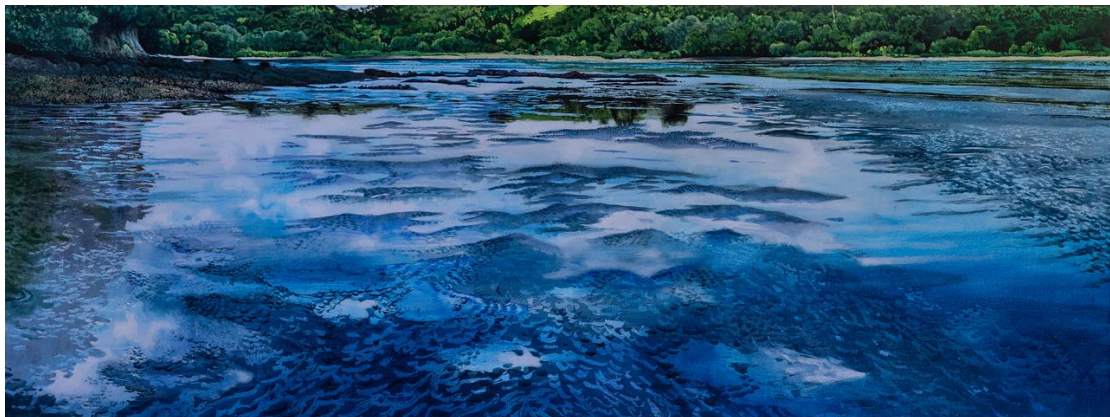
*2023-2024*

Q: How important is technique for you?

A: Technical considerations are central to the painter's task. Paint has a neutrality as a material; it doesn't even need to be applied with a brush or in any prescriptive way. However, the method of application is integral to what the image describes. Method matches content.

Q: Given the climate crisis, do you consider these tree portraits and seascapes as political alerts?

A: That's not my intention. Nonetheless, I'm making these paintings in the context of current dire environmental circumstances. A particular focus on a small local area of thriving trees on the shoreline seems more relevant than a generality about deforestation. The choice to prioritise external observation over a didactic issue-driven approach is inherently a political decision.



*Nowhere Everywhere*

*acrylic on canvas*

*2023-24*

*The deepest thing we can learn about nature is not how it works, but that it is the poetry of survival. The greatest reality is that the watcher has survived and the watched survives. It is the timeless woven through time, the cross-weft of all being that passes. Nobody who has comprehended this can feel alone in nature, can ever feel the absolute hostility of time.*

*The Blinded Eye* John Fowles (Animals, Vol. 13, No 9, January 1971)

C R Lark is a fiction writer, poet and radio/stage playwright, published, broadcast and performed in NZ, UK, France and Australia. She lectures in Creative Writing and has run WORDSMITH courses at the University of Canterbury, the University of Auckland, the University of Otago, The Creative Hub, Auckland, Waiheke Island Summer Schools and Waiheke Community Arts and currently for Waiheke Adult Learning 2019 – 2024. She is a mentor for the NZ Society of Authors (Pen NZ Inc) Mentorship Programme. She has an Honours Degree in Art History & Education from Cambridge University, UK.

She is the author of Fine Art Catalogue Texts:

- 2021**     *Open Air*, Q&A with Clive Humphreys, RDS Gallery, Dunedin
- 2017**     *The Process of Place*, Clive Humphreys, Waiheke Community Gallery, Aigantighe Gallery Timaru, Ashburton Art Gallery
- 2009**     *The Third Half*, Clive Humphreys, Lane Gallery, Auckland
- 2003**     *Bluebeard's Castle*, Nigel Buxton, City Art Gallery, Christchurch
- 1997**     *Retrospective*, Eion Stevens, Auckland and Dunedin





*Everywhere Nowhere*

*acrylic on canvas*

*2023-24*

*Images: Clive Humphreys*

*Photography: Peter Rees*

*Q&A text: C R Lark*

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