



LOCAL

GEORPHIES

15 Sep - 7 Oct 2022

Amanda Watson



When I’m painting outside I get absorbed in everything about it and lose track of time.



**Illuminating light, lichen and fallen branches, Wairēinga**  
Amanda Watson  
Ink on canvas  
1530×1800mm

I’m captivated by the way the ink moves on the canvas whether its soaking in or scattering across the surface; the sounds of birds singing and flying; the rustling of trees and the shifting shadows of sunlight moving across the painting surface; the way the canvas bunches around things and grabs on rough bark, the way it settles in dips between branches and the way the inks flow over these contours or soak into the weave; the gentle green of a kawakawa leaf; the organic smell of the spongy understory of fallen leaves and twigs, the flaky crumbling manuka bark and the small bits that fall into the ink.

Each thing has its unique character and seems animated and purposeful, and they all contribute to the way I work.

These paintings record my encounters with geographical places. They make visible the relationships between process, gesture, environments, and myself in ways unique to the time I spend there. I use a method of painting that fosters moments of the unexpected and although this may sound a bit counter-productive, it can create some refreshing moments of insight. The first part of the process involves spending time outside in places and wrapping surfaces of the land with canvas, and then painting on it in that bunched-up way. And then secondly in the studio environment I work into the canvases some more by reflecting on my encounters on-site and referring to sketches and photographs taken there.

Recently I’ve been painting in places around Ruapuke, Te Mata, Wairēinga and the wider Waikato area to see what might come of being attuned to these places through painting. I wanted

to find out if an act of painting that engaged environments as active participants could open up new ways of knowing these places. Could these places influence how the paintings turn would turn out? What might I recognise and respond and what other things might emerge out of this time of painting?

I’m interested in philosopher Jane Bennett’s way of thinking about how to look and listen to things in the world. Her theory suggests that interactions between things can occur to create new understandings,<sup>1</sup> and I’m also curious about Donna Haraway’s concept of ‘borderlands’ as places where the push and pull of knowledge occur and new connections arise.<sup>2</sup> Could the act of painting be viewed as a kind of ‘borderland’ where environments, myself and painting materials can interact in our own unique ways to reveal a new view of a place?

I feel like my encounters with these places have brought me a deeper affection and admiration for my local area and each beautiful thing in it. Although I may not have come to fully understand Whaingaroa, it’s like I have passed through a greatness, a generous and spacious place through painting here.

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# LOCAL GEOGRAPHIES

Wairēinga Bridal Veil Falls / 20 May 21

We found this expansive place with lots of nīkau and a deep understory of fallen down debris. It was deep in the forest but there was this illuminating light that made a nice glow. I made a few canvases here and worked on the fallen nīkau fronds and branches.

1. Jane Bennett, “The Force of Things” in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2010), 1–19.
2. Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).



Ruapuke / 4 May 21

It's one of those crisp mornings on the beach where the sky is so clear and blue. I walked to the south end of the beach and found this porous bubbly rockface with smoothed out circular holes everywhere. They hurt my bare feet but helped the canvas to grip on. I had already stained the canvas yellow and it seemed to fit so well with the bright day, and I worked ink into the canvas that gathered in small regular patches from the rock edges underneath.

In my studio / 15 May 21

I poured a steady stream of the blackest of inks into a container and pressed a wide brush into it until the ink had soaked into the bristles. It left a good amount of ink on the canvas and gave a rich finish. When the ink gets on the string-like threads coming off the sides of the paintings, they become quite lovely and stick to the plastic wall cover until they dry. These little parts remind me of the thin bits of twigs and leaf stems that are on the ground where I've been painting.



Te Mata / 18 June 21

When I arrived at this time of the morning the sunlight was catching the tips of leaves and branches and moving around making speckles on the ground. Two fantails flitted around and stayed near all morning, and a Keruru swooped past occasionally. There was a beautifully gnarly vine that was twisted around itself and covered in lichen. It looked like it had been there for a long time and I was keen to paint around it. I positioned a canvas on these vines and placed containers strategically at the points where any watery ink might run off. I painted here all morning crouching under the kawakawa until a cold breeze picked up in the afternoon, and I suddenly realised how tired and thirsty I was.

In my studio, 12 September 21

Today the sun was streaming into the room and the ink looked like it was sparkling. It looked like bubbles were coming out of it and sitting on the surface. They are captivating and I hope they will remain when it dries.



Clockwise from top:  
**Deep among the trees, Whaingaroa**  
Amanda Watson  
Ink, acrylic and compressed pigment on canvas  
500×600mm  
**Light at the edges, Te Mata**  
Amanda Watson  
Ink and acrylic on canvas  
400×600mm  
**Near the Pūriri tree, Te Mata**  
Amanda Watson  
Ink on canvas  
300×250mm







Pirongia / 25 January 22

There was a lot of bending and crouching as I painted among the supplejack/kareao today, and these vines made some really nice straight lines on the canvas. It had been raining recently and things were still damp and the backs of the canvases picked up imprints of moss and dirt. As we walked through the bush our footsteps sounded muffled like they were getting swallowed up, it felt like a quiet and forgotten place.

In my studio / 14 March 22

Today I worked into the canvases from photographs and tried to get the depth of the forest and the cool dampness of the place with lots of layered branches and vines and little patches of light shining through. As I painted I remembered the closeness of the place near Wairēinga and the strange light that made everything seem illuminated.



Top to bottom:

**An expansive place, Wairēinga**

Amanda Watson  
Ink and compressed  
pigment on canvas  
950×1000mm

**In the understory near Whaingaroa**

Amanda Watson  
Ink and glue size on canvas  
800×700×150mm

**Deep among the trees, Wairēinga**

Amanda Watson  
Ink and glue size on canvas  
500×430mm





In my studio / 16 May 22

Today in the studio I worked with watery ink and liked the way it trickled through the wet pigment to make brightly coloured marks. These marks soaked into the canvas easily and produced a solid and vibrant colour that fused with the canvas. This rich colour gives a sense of the deep hues in the forest when the sunlight catches things and illuminates their surfaces. Some of the trickles travelled a long way over the canvas and traversed many types of wrapping marks.



**Reaching the end of the day,  
Whaingaroa**

Amanda Watson  
Ink and acrylic on canvas  
400x500mm

**Flickering light, Te Mata**

Amanda Watson  
Ink and acrylic on canvas  
300x250mm

Cover image:

**When the sky clouded over  
in a tract of Kanuka, Whaingaroa**

Amanda Watson  
Ink on canvas  
610x520mm



Te Mata / 15 May 22

I worked mainly on small manuka trees that are low to the ground. Bright red mushrooms have popped up all around the undergrowth around the trees here and it feels dream-like.



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