

THE ART PAPER



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Meet Jack Hadley

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Twenty-two of Aotearoa's best ascendant artists and collectives are showing work at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki right now in *Aotearoa Contemporary*, an exhibition celebrating a new guard of creatives and ideas.

The Art Paper × Aotearoa Contemporary presents conversations with the artists, exploring the work they're showing and what they're drawing inspiration from. Here we speak to artist JACK HADLEY about his works, *PFS-T* and *PFS-R*.



Jack Hadley with *PFS-T* and *PFS-R*. Installation view, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, *Aotearoa Contemporary*, 6 July–20 October 2024. Photo: Felix Jack

Can you briefly describe the work you are showing in *Aotearoa Contemporary*?

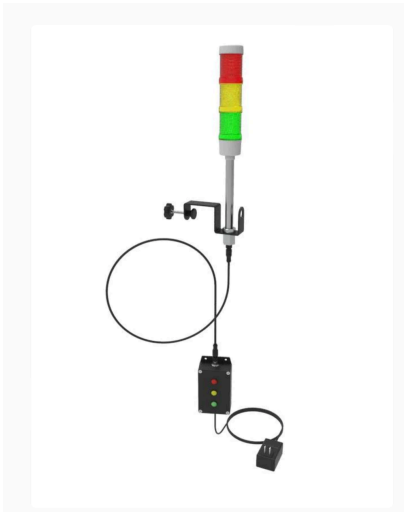
For the exhibition I have made two anthropomorphic lamps. They turn on and off in a very basic call-and-response pattern. The lamps are titled *PFS-T* and *PFS-R*, which stands for Prototype Figurative Sculpture. The flashing choreography is controlled and synchronised by a radio signal. The T and R suffixes designate which work is the radio transmitter and which is the receiver. The way the light bounces back and forth between the two lights makes it feel as if they are having a conversation.

They seem to reference both the human body and instruments of the factory or clinic. What are some of the things informing this fusion?

The works reference the body because I was thinking about display structures for fashion. Like mannequins, these works are repositionable and mobile. They have spring-tensioned poseable joints, adjustable telescopic bases and casters so they can be rolled around. When I was asked to be part of *Aotearoa Contemporary*, I was aware of how the exhibition would occupy the same gallery spaces as the Guo Pei fashion. While I'm into fashion, and the excess of fashion exhibitions, I find touring fashion exhibitions peculiar within the context of the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. They feel a bit like anomalies in the gallery's broader exhibition programming. I was thinking about bridging Guo Pei and *Aotearoa Contemporary*, of making works that feel as if they could have been left behind after the fashion exhibition.

Initially my works referenced the Guo Pei exhibition more directly. I was making jewellery out of aluminium and synthetic gemstone to drape and accessorise my sculptures with. In the process of making the work, the fashion allusions were pared back. I got distracted and excited about other references. I spend a lot of time on AliExpress, and I became super fixated on the language of heavy-duty and industrial objects I found on there. Components of *PFS-T* and *PFS-R* are drawn from AliExpress searches for medical and construction equipment. The jewellery I was making morphed into beaded electrical cords, based on swimming pool lane floats.

Below are some of the things I have stumbled across which have informed the material choices, colour schemes and the articulated joint design:



AliExpress can be so stressful to look at! What search terms do you use?

I really like the AliExpress ‘More to Love’ suggestions, where the algorithm just proposes stuff for me to buy based on what I have already clicked on. I am also a big fan of the AliExpress image search tool, where you upload a picture and it shows you similar products. Both features led me to find wild stuff.

I find it super interesting that you use it though because when you mentioned ‘modularity’ and ‘mobility’ my mind went straight to big-name mid-century designers—probably the most obvious reference point for anyone nodding to design—and this time when the idea that the world could be solved through good design and planning was really embraced. The junkiness of AliExpress seems like the antithesis of that in a lot of ways, but then if modularity is just the subdivision of a system into its parts, then these huge online retailers do it to perfection. I know you’ve made work before thinking about the visual strategies of retail so I’m curious how you think about these things: objects, commodities, production, user experience and so on?

It’s funny huh, where the ideals of Modernism pop up, diluted and adapted. My studio is above a preschool. The modular geometric forms and primary colours of the childrens’ furniture and play equipment are taken

from mid-century design, scaled down and translated into plastic.

In the new work I am making at the moment, I have been trying to engage more directly with object/commodity/production dynamics. I have been attempting to use the design logics, efficiencies and manufacturing processes of mass production. While the scale I am working on is very small, I want the stuff I am making to feel like it's been spat out by this system. I want it to feel like something you stumble across on AliExpress.

As well as these works for *Aotearoa Contemporary*, you've recently worked on an exhibition at Objectspace responding to a work by Don Driver. His works are often described as sculptures that *behave* like paintings, and yours might also be described as sculptures that *behave* ... though like what exactly I'm not sure. Maybe like objects that are meant to behave like humans? Is anthropomorphism something you think about?

There is a thread of anthropomorphism through a lot of my work, but it is particularly blatant in the works at Auckland Art Gallery. For this exhibition I was deliberately attempting to work within the tradition of figurative sculpture. I like how it's a default sculptural format. It's a strongly established language and a lot of decisions are made for you. These conventions also mean there is plenty of possibility to push against and to confuse. *PFS-T* and *PFS-R* are assembled modular components that bolt together. I was thinking of them as flat-pack kit sets for figurative sculptures, kit sets where some of the parts have gotten mixed up.

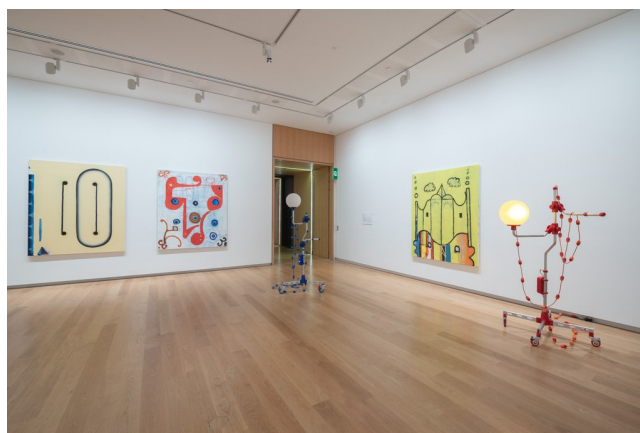
Finally, what does 'contemporary' mean to you?

I've been avoiding answering this question. It's a slippery-slope-downwards-spiral.

Jack Hadley is an artist and educator based in Tāmaki Makaurau. He graduated from Elam School of Fine Arts with an MFA in 2020.

Aotearoa Contemporary is on at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki from 6 July – 20 October 2024. Entry is free.

Below: Jack Hadley, *PFS-T* and *PFS-R*, 2024, aluminium extrusion, thermoplastic polyester, electronic components, industrial castors and stainless steel. Installation view, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, *Aotearoa Contemporary*, 6 July–20 October 2024. Commissioned by Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. Courtesy of the artist



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