



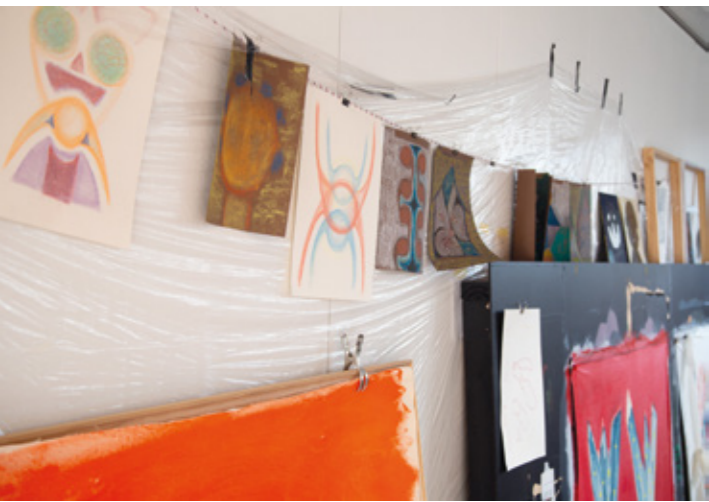
INTERVIEW
Alice Lines

PHOTOGRAPHY
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& Hannah Ireland



IN THE STUDIO

PAINTINGS ON GLASS
WERE ARTIST HANNAH
IRELAND'S FIRST LOVE
— NOW SHE EXPLORES
HER MÉTIER ACROSS
MANY MEDIUMS.



ABOVE Drawings in pastel, chalk and pencil hang in Hannah Ireland's studio, awaiting her upcoming exhibition at Laree Payne Gallery in Hamilton. **BELOW** Freshly etched Perspex panels stacked against the studio wall.



Your work is a form of contemporary portraiture — how did this begin? I grew up in a large household with seven siblings, Mum and Dad. Within this environment I was, and continue to be, what I call 'the observer'. Outside the family home, however, this isn't a constant: I change in response to different social environments like a chameleon. This isn't unique to me; it's something we all do to varying degrees. An awareness of reconfiguring oneself in relation to various social arenas is totally fascinating to me.

I completed a double degree at the University of Auckland, studying Fine Art and Psychology at once. Although I didn't know how that would work itself out at the time, it seems quite obvious retrospectively. As you can imagine, studying both fields simultaneously meant that I was constantly flicking between them, until they found a way to be one. Psychology itself is so broad — it isn't about gaining absolute knowledge, but rather striving to understand. My creative practice is reflective of this.

Your portraits evoke people, feelings and memories in a successfully slippery way. Tell me more... Although I refer to my works as portraits, they aren't always after a certain person. More often than not, they aren't after anyone in particular. They are hyperbolic and non-representational, sometimes with flowers for eyes, no nose, a mouth which traverses an entire face, etc.

What drives me to maintain a looseness and spaciousness in the work is a concern for the emotive potential from the perspective of the viewer. Of course, an inherent aspect of making art is understanding that works have a life beyond the intention and control of the maker. This is a space that I actively lean into within my practice, allowing room for a relationship to form between the work and the viewer that is beyond my own. In this way I hope that viewers are able to translate the work in a meaningful way for them — however that looks. At times this feels vulnerable, but I find that, to leave space, it's necessary to embrace the muddiness of experimentation, the rawness of human nature/error and to be unapologetically forgiving in play.

Your material choices have, to date, been diverse including painting on glass, cast acrylic, transparent silk, paper and canvas... More often than not I am following multiple tangents at once, bouncing around in the studio with multiple works on the go across a variety of surfaces in a variety of mediums. This likely appears very chaotic to studio visitors but, as a process-based maker, I am craving 'a-ha' moments that can be found when I successfully activate materials in new ways. Once these moments take place, I tend to hyper-fixate on those materials and they become the exhibition.

When thinking of my work, most people call to mind my paintings on glass which will forever be my first love. I am attracted to transparent surfaces, perhaps for their direct >



THIS PAGE The artist's studio during her time spent with the Papatūnga programme (through Te Tuhi art gallery) — an initiative aimed at pragmatically supporting artists, allowing creative research, development and production to flourish.



ABOVE *Somewhere to Land*, a pre-framed pencil and chalk drawing on brown paper, paired with an etching carved into cast acrylic.
BELOW An exploration of materials and layering in the studio.



conversation to the veils or screens we tend to hide behind, such as phones, windows or clothing. As I move from one project to another, I often think about this and how I may find a new way of intervening.

In your exhibition at Laree Payne (in March 2025), which materials did you opt to work with and why? Laree visited my graduate exhibition at Elam in 2019. It was the first time she saw my work (and shortly after I showed with her for the first time). At that point I was working on a plethora of materials including weed mat, OHP slips and paper, among other things. Using large bulldog clips, I layered these ‘slides’ together to form a single image (compiled of many) and these formed part of my final presentation.

Laree and I have spoken about this multiple times over the last five years and my exhibition, *Sunday Morning Beneath a Feathered Sky*, references these early works (albeit in a much more refined way).

The exhibition involves a collection of drawings, each comprising two parts: a drawing (pastel, chalk and pencil) on brown paper, and an etching carved into cast acrylic. These two parts of the work are housed inside a single frame with 20mm of space held between them so that, together, they form a single image.

Are the new portraits akin to what we have seen before or different? For some time now I’ve been developing and growing a personal index of symbols and motifs. Some of these have appeared in paintings already – such as in the recent works I presented in Aotearoa Contemporary for Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. Many of them, however, have come into existence more recently.

These symbols and motifs spring from personal observation and commemorate momentary encounters of this place (Tāmaki Makaurau). Both the etchings and the drawings draw heavily on this index of new-found symbols/motifs alongside the head-like forms that often populate my work. Through the act of layering the two parts of each work, the pictures cross-pollinate and new imagery emerges. There is a gentle hum to these works as they vibrate and shift, as you do upon looking at them. They will not sit still and I can’t wait to share them.

What advice would you give to emerging artists who are trying to find their voice within the contemporary art world, especially in Aotearoa? Don’t let fear hold you back, whether that be taking the plunge and executing work you have been thinking about making for the longest time, entering an award you feel is out of your league or allowing people to share in your practice.... be courageous and allow yourself the space to grow. Become your own most gracious supporter and friend. ♣
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