

*à la Tōrea Pango* (in the manner of the variable oystercatcher) is a collaborative collection of works by eight different artists currently on show at Laree Payne Gallery, Hamilton.

What is somewhat unusual about this array of pieces is how they intertwine with each other at various interpretative levels.

So we have Andrew Barber's *Stiff Blanket (A man as a bird in a blanket)*, which presents as a kind of Swannndri confection on a stretcher to mimic an abstract painting; think Rosalie Gascoigne without the letters or the grids of Andrew Farquhar or further afield, Ad Reinhardt.

Barber in his day job is in the business of protecting New Zealand native birds, and he, accordingly, perches his canvas (blanket of protection) on a low plinth of orange wooden legs to reference the oystercatcher. By turns quirky, charming and humorous, here we see high art in an engaging exchange with Kiwi vernacular in a playful configuration for serious ends.

Next to this we have an even more coltish and frisky work with more than a touch of the impish – two ersatz rocking horses, come sawhorses, called *Orange Builder's Pony With Ear Bonnet or Protective Muff*. What this mouthful presents us with is a concoction of elements that together resemble a sawhorse turned into a kind of toy, complete with ears made from a glove and tail constructed from a hand duster. Stroller wheels as hooves and a button, when pressed, plays a sound, completes the picture, or sculpture in this case.

Again charming, funny and arch. We are in an arena where art mixes it up with designer plaything with the smallest nod to the notion of protection, courtesy of PĀNiA!

And toy is again invoked in the third member of the team – Te Maari and her dolls made of felt and wool with crocheted elements, sporting Māori motifs and given the names of birds, one of which is the oystercatcher. The playful is being employed here to signal matters of social and cultural significance.

Then up steps Dr P with a couple of loaves of real bread placed on a wooden chopping board. Called *Bird Sculpture*, what we have here is an altered readymade, altered because this sliced Vogel's loaf, held together by thin bamboo stakes, has been left outside for the birds to peck at, then rescued before the thing was completely demolished. A collaborative piece between 'man' and members from the avian population.

As is becoming apparent, there is a bird theme starting to emerge here. But we're not done.

A.A.M. Bos has found a distressed plastic snail trap and 'turned' it into a bird bath and water trough. This readymade, hung from the ceiling of the gallery, recalling the Dadaists, has undergone a transformation from common object to art piece, from animal trap to animal enhancer.

That transformational exercise is given a final twist in the work of JBB & Greg Thomas who, in a direct link with the work of Dr P, have taken Vogel's advertising, screen printed the text and formatted it into plastic bags containing information about the *original mixed grain*.

The final flourish sees Prairie Hatchard-McGill create some bespoke curtains for the single window in the gallery. This baroque collaged fabrication, *Scrape (diptych)* – mixed media elements on silk and linen, presents something that conjures with the past, florid and blowsy, an excuse to indulge in a kind of broken-down flamboyance complete with dangling attached pearls.

Altogether this is a show that kicks up its heels in a very postmodern spirited and good humoured manner, engaging the viewer at multiple levels. Well worth a visit, a collaboration between Laree Payne Gallery and Mokopōpaki.

- Peter Dornauf, May 2025

Mokopōpaki