

ARWEN FLOWERS

Unpacking

3-28 October

Helensville Art Centre, Auckland.

My practice examines body-held and felt knowledge and questions notions of care, ownership and agency. Through making a painting, my body's internal wisdom emerges as contemporary visual abstractions. I prioritise the traces of my body's intervention as these imprints or markings are a unique visual language encoded with references to places, people, objects, memories and experiences. Each gestural impression or mark results from close proximity encounters with surfaces and is influenced by haptic engagement with materials and borrowed colour. Affective relationships¹ occur as I apply and remove the mediums with wiping and scrubbing motions derived from domestic-based maintenance actions.

This year, I have been sorting through stored family belongings, an intimate durational experience that evoked memories of lived moments associated with each object. The boxes I opened were intended to keep the contents safe, but the cardboard construction had deteriorated, endangering the items inside. Their safe storage was an attempt to preserve the possessions and, by extension, our family identity². Opening up these archives kindled and fostered a sense of shared culture³, but the damaged packaging jeopardised the preservation of my family history and, with that, my sense of self. This collection of paintings was made using methods that explore the nature of care in this context.

By applying mediums with sponges and cloths in slow and soft mark-making motions—layers of thin and thick paint formed from the residues of added and subtracted material. In this manner I have explored aspects of fragility, durability, and the accumulative and degradational effects of time. In conjunction, my body responded to sensations of colour tone and intensity borrowed from cardboard boxing, masking tape, and internal fabrics used as wrapping materials. As I worked, my body animated its sensations and impulses and translated them through paint. Parallels emerged between my body, the boxes and my painting—each became a vessel containing, safeguarding, and relinquishing its precious contents. However, all vessels are vulnerable to the effects of disregard and time, requiring attention and maintenance to remain functional or intact.

Through making these artworks, I have given my body room to express a response to the physical and social conventions of archiving as necessary method of preserving and sustaining family connections, personal identity, and a sense of belonging.

¹ Massumi, Brian. *Politics of Affect*. Newark, United Kingdom: Polity Press, 2015.
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=4029964>. ix.

² Woodham, Anna, Laura King, Liz Gloyn, Vicky Crewe, and Fiona Blair. 2017. "We Are What We Keep: The 'Family Archive', Identity and Public/Private Heritage." *Heritage & Society* 10 (3): 203–20. doi:10.1080/2159032X.2018.1554405. 203.

³ West, Gabrielle Emma-Jean. "Why Keep It If You Can't See It!: An Investigation into Public and Professional Attitudes Towards Collection Care, Access and Utilisation in New Zealand Museums". Open Access Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington, January 1, 2011.
<https://doi.org/10.26686/wgtn.16992898>.

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