

The Hokianga Community Drawing Project

Laura Donkers, PhD, MFA, BFA

Independent artist-curator-researcher

Conference Theme: Drawing the politics of location and ideas of sites which offer an experience of absolute belonging, or equally question such an ideal and consider the practicalities of emplacement.

Keywords: collective drawing, community project, artist residency, socio-cultural networks, cultural principles, biculturalism

Abstract

“When we do not have the words to say something, drawing can define both the real and unreal in visual terms”¹

This paper will discuss the Hokianga Community Drawing Project as an expanded form of collective drawing to uncover connections between people, place and location in the Northland region of Hokianga, despite the politics of biculturalism.² Biculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand is a ‘political paradigm that defines relations between the indigenous Māori population and the settler population of New Zealanders of European descent (Pākehā)’.³

This creative community project took place in November 2023 in the form of an artist residency undertaken by ecological artist, Laura Donkers, and was hosted at The Church, Rawene by Creative Initiatives Trust (Auckland). It worked collaboratively with two locally based community galleries to deliver collaborative drawing workshops and by interconnecting across different social situations through a women’s health promotion evening, a second-hand book sale and a weekly produce market. The community’s drawings were collected onto a primed canvas roll (7.5x1.6m) using charcoal made from the local mangrove forests that are a feature of the coastal location.

This drawing project generated a collective visual expression of *home* by the community, who are predominantly Māori with a significant minority of Pākehā and other ethnicities. The resulting drawing navigated bicultural difference to uncover solidarity, appreciation and respect for the diverse cultural identities of the population. Thus, achieving a restorative function through shared emotional connection to location, place and community expressed via the medium of collective drawing.

¹ Kovats, T. (2007) *The Drawing Book – A Survey of Drawing: The Primary Means of Expression*. London: Black Dog Publishing.

² Stewart, G. (2016). From both sides of the indigenous-settler hyphen in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 1-10. doi:10.1080/00131857.2016.1204904

³ Terruhn, J. (2019). Settler Colonialism and Biculturalism in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In: Ratuva, S. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Ethnicity*. Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0242-8_71-1