
DREAMING FROM AFAR

14 February – 2 May 2026

BRUNELLE DIAS PRIMBS
INDIA, AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND
GIAN MANIK
AUSTRALIA
TYRONE TE WAA
NGĀTI TŪWHARETOA

FREE

**GUS
FISHER**

GALLERY

74 Shortland St
Auckland Central

gusfishergallery.auckland.ac.nz

Tuesday – Friday
10am – 5pm
Saturday
10am – 4pm

INTRODUCTION

Dreaming from afar brings together three artists from Aotearoa and overseas whose distinctive approaches to painting depict places both visited and imagined. From Seville's customary Easter processions to the mythologised bathhouses of Orientalism and the communal mattress room of the wharenuī, each artist probes what it means to encounter a place of tradition or history through their own contemporaneity.

The exhibition showcases major new commissions in which the artists push the boundaries of their practice through bold thematic and material experimentation. Painting directly onto single bedsheets, Tyrone Te Waa's use of domestic items as his base material forms a conversation with brunelle dias primbs, whose large-scale depiction of a faux mink blanket asserts the object's resonance as a working-class inheritance. A blurring of historic and contemporary culture is seen in Gian Manik's site-specific fresco paintings, which magnify queer social spaces portrayed in the films *Spa Night* (2016) and *Savage* (2018). Similarly, dias primbs' "plastic fresco" plays with the duality between its subject matter and materiality, adopting a 13th-century gesso recipe to portray items of tourist kitsch.

New bodies of work by dias primbs and Manik, both informed by time spent in Europe, query the subjectivity of perception through a shared interest in figuration and Western tradition.

While dias primbs considers how her upbringing has shaped her expectations and impressions of European destinations, Manik's richly referential compositions serve as pastiches of Orientalist paintings, challenging the entrenched hierarchies of art history and the cultural imagination.

The inclusion of figures—whether as pairs in the work of Manik, cropped or obscured in dias primbs' paintings, or metonymically implied in the work of Te Waa—is central to the exhibition and its narrative of dreaming as something that stems from the imagination and permeates the physical world. Conjuring scenes of intimacy and presence, Te Waa's paintings translate the memories of his dreams into sculptural forms that stand upright like ancestral pou (support posts) within wharenuī. By materialising his intangible connections with te ao moemoeā (the dreamscape), Te Waa subverts the hierarchy of the real and the imaginary through a Māori lens.

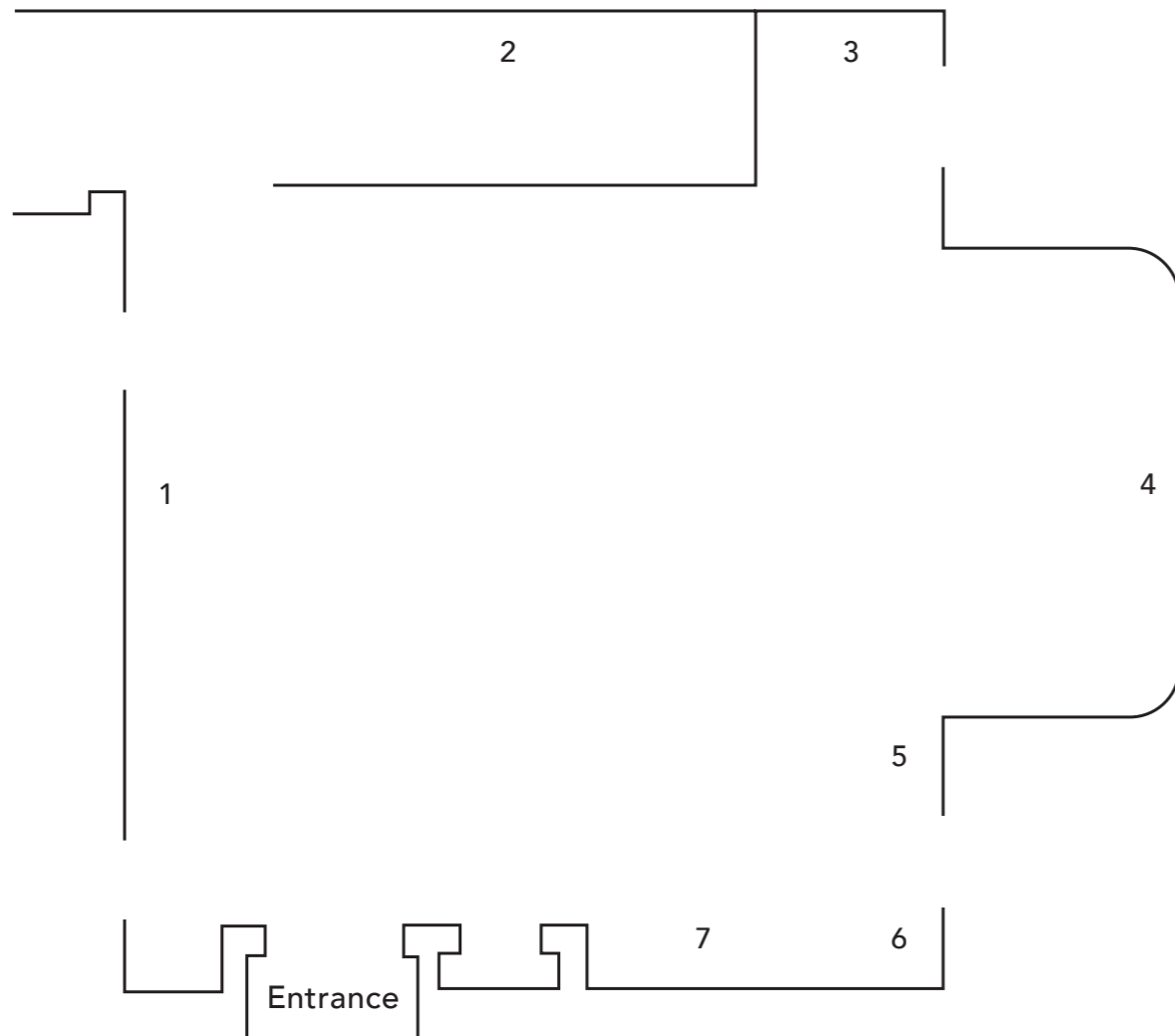
From the distant places in dias primbs' and Manik's images, to the familial surroundings of a wharenuī, Te Waa's work connects the exhibition's narrative view from the physical yearning for faraway places with the immaterial. Touching on ideas of Orientalism, queerness, religion, and whakapapa, *Dreaming from afar* considers the complexities of history and nostalgia through a painterly environment that blends the physical with the imaginary.



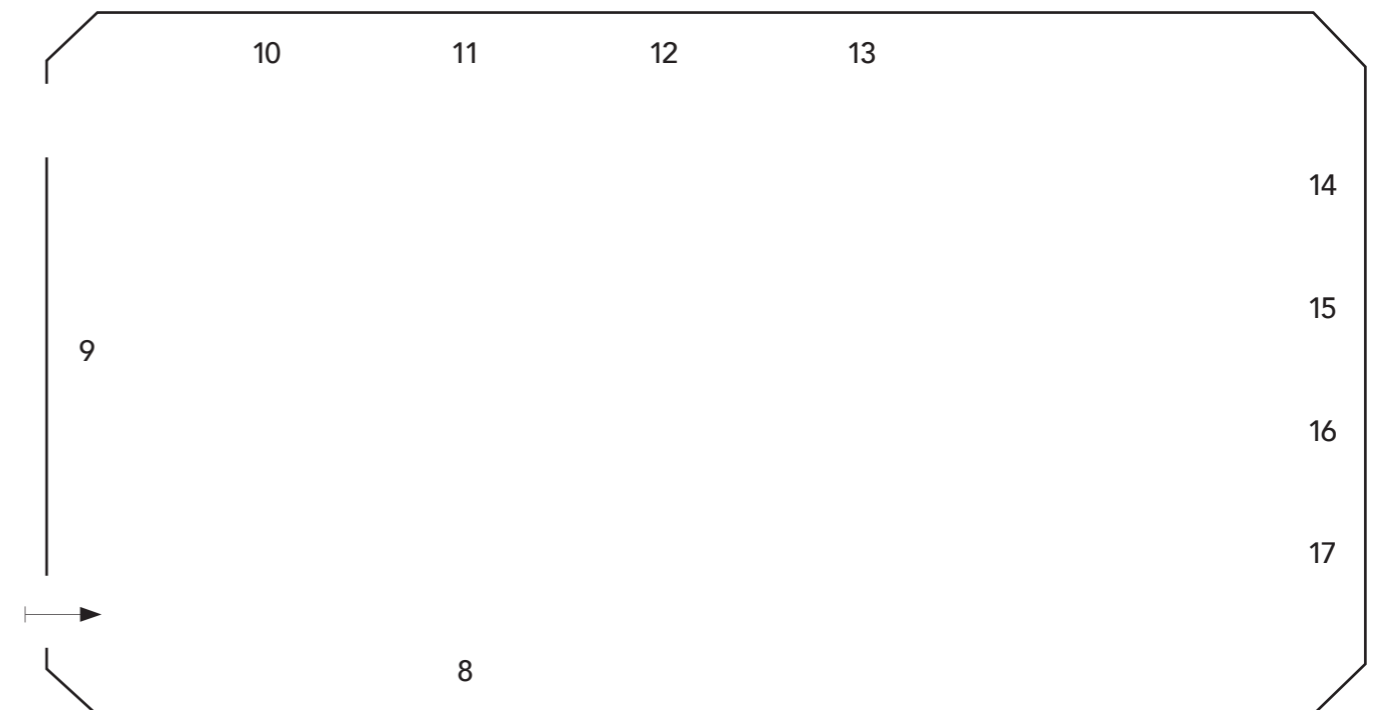
Gian Manik, *Camouflage*, 2025. Courtesy of the artist and Sutton Gallery. Photography by Michelle Tran.

LIST OF WORKS

1. **Gian Manik**
Camouflage
2025
oil and ink on cotton
2. **Gian Manik**
Sex as work
2026
pigment, egg yolk,
myrrh extract on lime
plaster
3. **Gian Manik**
Contact Zone
2025
oil and ink on cotton
4. **Gian Manik**
Desire
2026
pigment, egg yolk,
myrrh extract on lime
plaster
5. **Gian Manik**
Trade
2025
oil on linen
6. **Gian Manik**
Absolution
2025
oil on linen
7. **Gian Manik**
A naked almond
2025
oil and ink on cotton



8. **brunelle dias primbs**
polyester tattoo
2026
oil on calico
9. **brunelle dias primbs**
low hanging fruit
2025
oil on canvas
10. **brunelle dias primbs**
baggage carousel
2025-2026
oil on canvas
11. **brunelle dias primbs**
God of my mothers
2025-2026
oil on board
12. **brunelle dias primbs**
but only say the word
2025-2026
oil on canvas
13. **brunelle dias primbs**
salad days
2025-2026
oil on canvas
14. **Tyrone Te Waa**
A Nan Plays Whangaipeke
2026
mattress foam,
bedsheet, dye, thread,
string, timber, rākau,
fabric
15. **Tyrone Te Waa**
Free hangi over Te Rohe Pōtae
2026
mattress foam,
bedsheet, dye, thread,
string, timber, rākau,
fabric
16. **Tyrone Te Waa**
Moko's, Moko's, Mokomoko
2026
mattress foam,
bedsheet, dye,
thread, string,
timber, rākau, fabric
17. **Tyrone Te Waa**
W/Whakapakoko
2026
mattress foam,
bedsheet, dye,
thread, string,
timber, rākau, fabric



GIAN MANIK

Australia



Courtesy of the artist and Sutton Gallery.

A naked almond

2025

oil and ink on cotton

“But of course, there is Orientalism and Orientalism. If for painters like [Jean-Léon] Gérôme the Near East existed as an actual place to be mystified with effects of realness, for other artists it existed as a project of the imagination, a fantasy space or screen onto which strong desires—erotic, sadistic, or both—could be projected with impunity.”

— Linda Nochlin, *“The Imaginary Orient”* (1983)

Gian Manik grew up surrounded by reproductions of Old Master paintings, in the form of thrifted art books and copies of famous works painted by his mother and grandfather. It was through these that he first learned to paint.

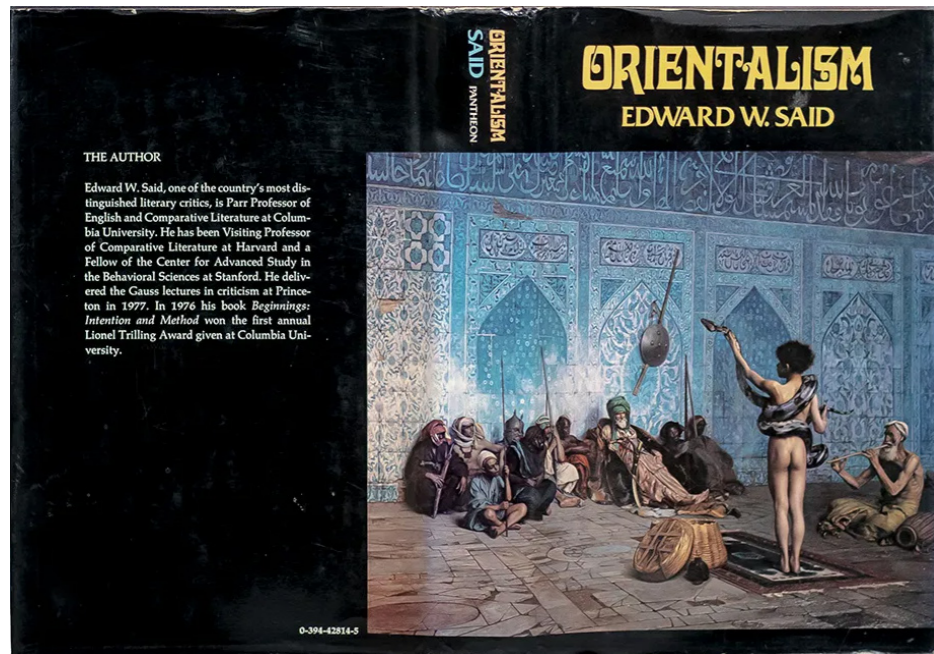
Manik’s own artistic practice has explored various tropes preserved in the historical painting genres of landscape, still life and portraiture. As a queer artist with Dutch and Indian heritage, he has also undertaken an extensive study of Orientalism and queer representation in art history. Manik merges these interests in a new series of works that seeks to challenge the entrenched hetero- and ethnocentric hierarchies that prevail in art history and the cultural imagination.

The works presented here were developed during a residency in Prato, Italy, where the smaller oil paintings were produced. Facetious and richly referential, these compositions serve as pastiches of 19th-century Orientalist paintings. Emerging alongside European colonial expansion, Orientalism encompassed a movement of Western artists who depicted scenes from the Middle East, North Africa and Asia. Artists often used carefree artistic license in borrowing and indiscriminately mixing details from various cultures, despite their work appearing to be ethnographically realistic to the Western audience. Claiming to portray everyday life, these theatrical compositions presented exoticised and often eroticised views of faraway places.

This slippage between realism and fantasy becomes a key undercurrent of Manik’s engagement with the Orientalist tradition. Rather than serving as an original to forge or reproduce, for Manik the art historical material becomes a site for re-inscription, where technical fidelity is layered with imagined detail. Taking a collage-like approach, his references range from films and historic artworks to bathhouse fetish Instagram accounts. *Absolution*, for instance, borrows the architecture of Cathedral Santa Maria Assunta in Brescia, encountered on Manik’s travels, inserting a crouching, Atlas-like figure within the church interior.

Other paintings feature a collection of reimagined tropes, including male odalisque figures, pastoral scenes and bathhouses. *Camouflage*, the largest of Manik’s oil paintings, portrays two men embracing in a garden, recalling a long history of heterosexual couple or family portraiture set in idyllic, Arcadian surroundings. The dappled light falls onto their bare skin, heightening the intimacy of this interrupted, seductive moment.

Contact Zone riffs on a recognisable setting of the hammam, or Turkish bath. Whereas such scenes historically featured women attended by dark-skinned servants, here an older white masseur gazes at the buttocks of a nude man. A similar languid figure stretches across a wooden divan in *A naked almond*, accompanied by a fully dressed



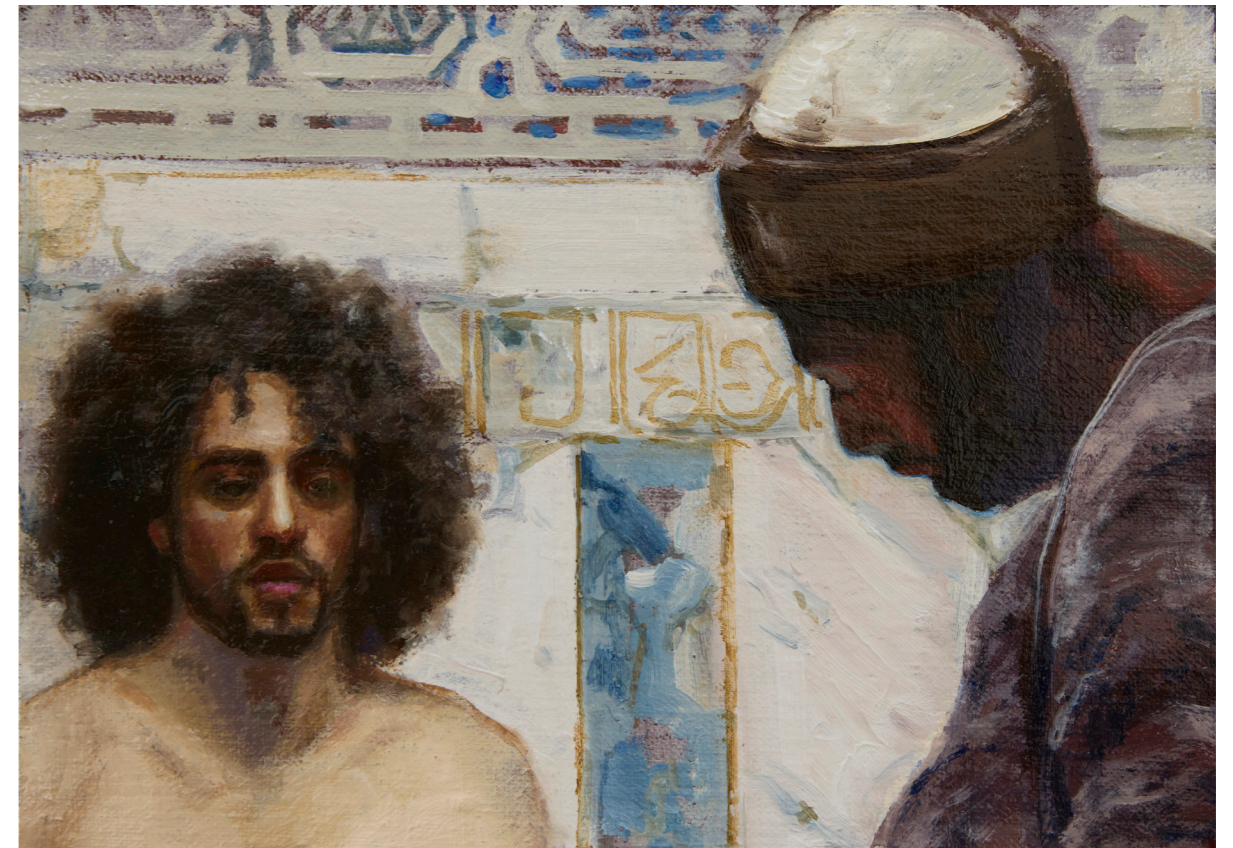
First edition of *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books: New York, 1978.

Arnaut, or *bashi-bazouk*—a term used during the Ottoman period for irregular mercenaries. *Bashi-bazouks* were often Albanian soldiers who were armed and maintained by the Empire but did not wear uniforms or receive payment. Seen as brutal and unpredictable, they captured the interest of many Orientalist painters with their distinctive Balkan dress.

Another painting, *Trade*, portrays a glimpse into a slave market scene. The title references the Orientalist trope and the word's layered use in queer vernacular, where it can be used to describe a straight-passing queer man or a man who identifies as straight but engages in queer sex for payment—as does a character in *Savage* (2018), the film depicted in one of Manik's frescoes. *Trade* is cropped tightly around the faces of two figures against a blue tiled wall, which echoes the ornamental tilework in Jean-Léon Gérôme's *The Snake Charmer* (c.1879). Long criticised for its ethnographic inaccuracies, *The Snake Charmer* was used by Edward Said on the cover of *Orientalism* (1978) and has since become emblematic of the genre's blending of fact and fiction.

The large frescoes painted directly onto the gallery walls expand Manik's inquiry through the language of cinema. These are the first frescoes produced by the artist, inspired by time spent in Italy. Closely associated with the Italian Renaissance, fresco is a demanding, time-sensitive mural technique involving the application of pigments onto lime plaster. Drawing on the medium's association with permanence and monumentality, Manik furthers his interest in contrasting historical traditions and materiality with contemporary subject matter.

The frescoes depict still images from contemporary films: *Spa Night* (2016) and *Savage* (2018). In *Spa Night*, set in Los Angeles, the hidden corners of a Korean bathhouse act as cruising spaces for queer men. The bathhouse's veiled eroticism is framed through the gaze of the protagonist who, in the pictured scene, remains a bystander, recalling the detached voyeurism of the Orientalist painter. *Savage*, a portrait of a French sex worker, revisits the trope of the "Moorish" rent boy from art and literary histories. In Manik's fresco, a French and a Serbian sex worker embrace beneath flashing club lights, upending the erotic hierarchies that haunt the Orientalist image.



Gian Manik, *Trade*, 2025. Courtesy of the artist and Sutton Gallery. Photography by Michelle Tran.

BRUNELLE DIAS PRIMBS

India, Aotearoa New Zealand



Detail. Courtesy of the artist.

baggage carousel

2025-2026
oil on canvas

brunelle dias primbs is known for her diaristic paintings that dwell on the intimacies of domestic scenes. This attention to “the small things” reflects the artist’s desire to understand what it means to connect with one’s surroundings, and how “holding space for the small aspects of [her] everyday life” can carry wider personal and political significance.¹ For this exhibition, dias primbs expands her focus to include vistas encountered during recent travels in Europe, poised alongside the familiar scenes of home.

Picturing tourist destinations she visited with her mother in Italy, Spain and Portugal, the artist reflects on how her conflicted perceptions of these sites are shaped by her faith and upbringing. Often rendered from cropped or skewed viewpoints, dias primbs’ compositions can be interpreted as visual manifestations of her subjectivity. They also reflect a painterly interest in treating the image as subject matter through the stretching and distorting of the image as a physical plane.

This suite of paintings marks a development in the artist’s treatment of the figure. While she has previously portrayed family and friends in domestic interiors—frequently blurring or hiding their faces—here the people depicted are anonymous strangers, hinted at or obscured within the broader setting. From crowds turned away from the viewer to the silhouette

of a child riding a carousel, the figures have an eerie, almost mirage-like quality.

In *but only say the word* and *low hanging fruit*, dias primbs portrays a Semana Santa procession she witnessed in Seville, Spain. Semana Santa is a week-long religious parade that commemorates the Passion of the Christ, observed during the final week of Lent and culminating on Easter Sunday. In *but only say the word*, a crucified Christ effigy sits atop a gilded float which towers over the surrounding crowd. These opulent floats are a staple of the Spanish Holy Week processions, often featuring life-like biblical scenes that are carried through the streets.

low hanging fruit presents a more ambiguous view of the same event, focusing on the devotional attire worn by members of Catholic confraternities, particularly the *capirote* or tall conical hood. The *capirote* conjures an unsettling association with the hoods later adopted by the white supremacist group, the Ku Klux Klan. Whilst both are used to cover the individual’s identity, the *capirote* is associated with the person’s attempt to get closer to God through a public yet anonymous penitence ritual. By cropping the image close and obstructing a view of the scene’s broader context, the artist highlights the visual affinities between these two disparate traditions and tests the viewer’s reception of the symbolism relayed.

Underpinning this body of work is the artist's ongoing meditation on working class and diasporic experience. The largest painting in the series elevates a faux mink blanket bought from Ōtara market soon after her family's arrival in Aotearoa. Featuring a bold tiger print, the blanket mimics vintage luxury yet is in fact cheaply mass-produced and can be found in many homes. Rendered at an imposing scale, *polyester tattoo* echoes the depiction of animal pelts as symbols of exotic opulence in historical painting and recasts the blanket as a contemporary emblem of shared migrant experience and class aspiration.

God of my mothers, which the artist refers to as a "plastic fresco", plays with the duality of high and low culture. In this small oil-on-board painting, dias primbs used a 13th-century gesso recipe to portray the glow-in-the-dark Virgin Mary statuettes collected by her devout grandmother. This material contradiction allows the artist to "recognise [her] own snobbery" towards the plastic kitsch of souvenir consumerism, while attending to the layered meanings these objects carry. Despite their often-unsustainable modes of production, souvenirs can function as access points, enabling the public to engage with the divine through affordable, mass-produced forms.

"I want to draw on the irony of admiring these symbols, but without mockery," dias primbs explains. "Religion and its customs live years beyond colonial influences. This exhibition inevitably touches on my family and my ties to the Catholic faith and the nostalgia and familiarity I have with it, while also being challenged by some of the cultural and spiritual positions it holds and reveres."

Born in Mumbai with ancestral ties to Goa, a former Portuguese colony, dias primbs considers the complex history and personal nostalgia imbued in these miniature Madonnas. Once introduced and now manufactured en masse, these plastic objects remain an intrinsic part of spiritual life for Goa's minority Christian community. For the artist, they embody a complex ambivalence, holding at once their synthetic materiality, colonial legacies and devotional potential.

1. The phrase 'small things' is a reference to Arundhati Roy's 1997 novel *The God of Small Things*. See brunelle dias, "introspective fieldworks; the everyday in flux," exegesis in support of practice-based thesis Master of Visual Arts, Auckland University of Technology, 2021.



brunelle dias primbs, *but only say the word*, 2025-2026.
Courtesy of the artist.

TYRONE TE WAA

Ngāti Tūwharetoa



Detail. Courtesy of the artist and Anna Miles Gallery.

W/Whakapakoko

2026

mattress foam, bedsheet, dye, thread, string,
timber, rākau, fabric

“The mattress room was the closest thing Māori got to the Pākeha fairytale, The Princess and The Pea. They held true to the fact that there comes a time as you grow, that you stop seeing the mattress room as the haven of dreamscape, and more part of the realities of adulthood and cultural duty. Like metamorphosis; from fairytale, to chore and responsibility — lore, to law.”

— Te Aōrere Delilah Parore-Southon
(Te Roroa, Te Kuihi, Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Te Whakatōhea)

Tyrone Te Waa often works with textiles, typically creating tactile sculptural installations from salvaged fabrics that sprawl, scaffold and inhabit the gallery space. For this exhibition, Te Waa extends his material vocabulary by transcribing his drawing and painting practice onto fitted bedsheets that he stretches over single-size mattresses as a form of sculpture.

The works reference the mattress storage room in a wharenuī, where bedding is kept ready for people who stay at the marae on important occasions—meetings, educational workshops, celebrations or funerals. During these gatherings, mattresses are laid out side-by-side across the floor of the wharenuī, with guests resting together beneath carvings of ancestors. For Te Waa, the mattress room serves as a quintessential symbol of contemporary Māori culture and materiality. He describes it as an unintended playground and “the most fun place on the marae, where kids go in secret to jump on stacked mattresses and have pillow fights with all their cousins.”

At the same time, the mattress room evokes sleeping in the safety of the wharenuī surrounded by family and being cradled in the presence of tūpuna. The act of collective dreaming and spending time together—both physically in the communal space of the wharenuī and spiritually in te ao

moemoeā—links the two realms together, creating an opportunity for connection with whānau past and present.

Familial connections are deeply embedded in this series, shaping both its subject matter and process. *Free hangi over Te Rohe Pōtae*, which depicts a hongī, was painted collaboratively with Te Waa’s cousins. Another painting titled *W/Whakapakoko* incorporates his brother’s twenty-first key, a symbolic gift traditionally presented on one’s twenty-first birthday to mark their transition to adulthood. Here, the original two-metre carved staff is reimagined as a leaf with an elongated stem and eye-shaped cut-outs, revealing the pink foam beneath.

Around the time Te Waa started developing this series, his grandmother asked the family to build a wakarere for her. Parallel to this exhibition, the artist worked on the wakarere and gravestone designs, letting the two creative processes cross-pollinate and imbue the paintings with references to burial practices and the spiritual world. *A Nan Plays Whangaiepeke*, for instance, originated from the traced outline of his grandmother’s body, which also served as a starting point for the wakarere design. The figure was then abstracted further into Whangaiepeke, a kaitiaki taniwha significant for Te Waa’s hapu Ngāti Hikairo.

Much of the subject matter depicted in Te Waa's paintings was developed from his drawing practice, which includes a daily ritual of translating the previous night's dream into imagery when he wakes up. Each painting stands as its own personality and as a protective symbol for a dream that creates a safe passage from te ao moemoeā to the physical world. *Moko's, Moko's, Mokomoko*, depicting a kaleidoscopic lizard smoking a cigarette, was painted outside at night, with the moon and a phone torch as the only sources of light.

Drawn from his subconscious, some symbols remain a mystery even to the artist himself, yet they still utilise a recognisable visual language consistent with his earlier practice. In *W/ Whakapakoko*, the figure's elongated fingers and the surrounding star-like motifs draw on Te Waa's use of spiked or feathered features to evoke queerness. The sharp division across the torso suggests a split between two realms and recalls the shape of Te Waa's anthropomorphic bust sculptures. This sense of ambiguity allows the works to function simultaneously as personal, cultural and speculative narratives.

The installation references the architecture of the whareniui, and the artist's ongoing interest in its relationship to the body. The mattresses' upright positioning and placement in the gallery is

symbolic of the poupou, which often portray images of ancestors. The wrapped barriers included in the installation build upon the use of scaffolding in Te Waa's previous work, but here they function as thresholds rather than sculptural supports. For Te Waa, they mimic the access and protection that fences provide in relation to spiritual dimensions and funereal practices. The artist is interested in how they function in various cultural contexts, from the wrought iron railings at historic cemeteries which secured the burial site from animals or grave robbers, to the fences surrounding the outline of the marae which delineate tapu from noa.

Glossary of Te Reo Māori terms

hapu – kinship group or subtribe
hongī – pressing noses in greeting
kaitiaki – guardian
marae – meeting grounds
noa – ordinary, unrestricted
poupou – carved side posts
taniwha – water spirit or creature, which can take many forms from logs to reptiles and whales
tapu – sacred
te ao moemoeā – dreamscape
tūpuna – ancestors
wakarere – burial vessel
whānau – family
whareniui – Māori meeting house



Tyrone Te Waa, *A Nan Plays Whangaipeke*, 2026.
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Miles Gallery.

BIOGRAPHIES



brunelle dias primbs, *God of my mothers*, 2025-2026.
Courtesy of the artist.

brunelle dias primbs is a painter whose diaristic practice dwells on the intimacies of domestic and everyday scenes. Interested in the relationship between figure and ground, she often portrays life as a first-generation immigrant to Aotearoa and explores the metaphysical nature of her environment through the fluid nature of paint. dias primbs holds her Master of Visual Arts from AUT, School of Art and Design.

Recent exhibitions include *A Moment to Hold* (The Arts House Trust, 2025), *aaj kal* (CoCA, 2024), *yahaan* (Corban's Estate Art Centre, 2024), *kiss taraf* (The Art Paper Office, 2023), *soft protest* (play_station, 2023) and *the way things are* (The Physics Room, 2022). dias primbs was a finalist in the Eden Arts' Art School Award and her work is held in the Auckland University of Technology Art Collection.

Gian Manik lives and works in Naarm Melbourne, Australia. A queer artist of Dutch and Indian heritage, he often explores various tropes preserved in historical painting, including Orientalism and queer representation throughout art history. Manik holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) from Curtin University and a Master of Fine Arts from Monash University.

He has exhibited across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, including at the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane (2025), Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide (2025), Gertrude Glasshouse, Melbourne (2024), Sumer, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland (2024) and Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne (2022). Gian's work is held in various public collections including the Art Gallery of Western Australia, City of Darrebin and ArtBank Sydney.

Tyrone Te Waa is a Taumarunui-based artist whose practice is informed by autobiographical and ancestral reflections and queer histories in Aotearoa New Zealand. Primarily known for bound and scaffolded fabric sculptures, he works across drawing, painting, felting and wearable objects. Te Waa holds a Master of Creative Practice from Unitec Institute of Technology Te Whare Wānanga o Wairaka and in 2022 he received an Arts Foundation of New Zealand Te Tumu Toi Springboard Award.

Recent exhibitions include *How to Make a Home* (Objectspace, 2024), *Aotearoa Contemporary* (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2024), *Te Rūma Moenga / The Mattress Room (Memory Foam)* (Casula Powerhouse, 2024), *WīWī WāWā* (Anna Miles Gallery, 2023) and *Whetūrangitia/Made As Stars* (Dowse Art Museum, 2022).

PUBLIC PROGRAMME

Workshop

PILLOW PAINTING

Sat 14 February, 10.30AM-1.30PM

DROP IN

Artist talk

BRUNELLE DIAS PRIMBS, GIAN MANIK & TYRONE TE WAA

Sat 14 February, 2-3PM

DROP IN

Tour

ARTIST & CURATOR WALKTHROUGHS

with The Arts House Trust
& brunelle dias primbs

Sat 28 February, 1.30-3.45PM

RSVP

Workshop

WHĀNAU DAY

with Auckland Arts Festival

Sun 8 March, 10AM-4PM

RSVP

Film screening

NAVIGATING SLOWLY

with CIRCUIT Artist Moving Image

Sat 14 March, 2-3PM

RSVP

Talk

UNPACKING ORIENTALISM: A PANEL DISCUSSION

with Dr Ian Fookes, Dr Anya Samarasinghe
& Balamohan Shingade

Sat 21 March, 2-3PM

RSVP

Workshop

STORYTIME & WATERCOLOURS

for tamariki

Sat 11 April, 10.30-11.30AM

DROP IN

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